

The background of the book cover is a traditional Chinese ink and wash illustration. It depicts a phoenix (Fenghuo) with white, blue, and red plumage, shown in flight at the top. Below the bird are several lotus flowers in various stages of bloom, some with yellow centers. The bottom of the cover is filled with stylized, swirling clouds in shades of purple, pink, and white. The title '鳳于九天' is written in large, bold, black characters with a white outline, positioned vertically in the center.

鳳于九天

風弄 著

柳瑤 插畫

Feng Yu Jiu Tian

Volume One



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Sooky's reflection:

To the fans of FYJT,

Wow, what can I say? Going through my translations made me want to put a hole in the wall with my head!

At the beginning of this journey, I was doubtful if I'd ever go beyond a couple of chapters. In the time spent on translating one chapter, it's the equivalent of many chapters of manga I could be scanlating instead!

Something within me fought on, wanting to share with the world the much untouched Chinese BL novels. There were times I completely abhorred the gruelling hours I had to spend refining this evil language. The countless late nights and early mornings I've spent translating has given me highs and lows. Whoever is cutting onions around me at the moment should stop!

Although it has taken over a year to complete one volume, I'm glad to have given my time to strangers like you. From working on this series I have become acquainted with many of the LJers that ~~stalk~~ follow me. Especially, beanscurd who I can fangirl with...I need to confess my love for you here.

Last but not least I would like to thank Krystal, whom helped to compile this booklet so I could start re-living the hell of proofing the damn thing! -sooky

※: This symbol means there are explanations in the end of the book. These are ranged in appearance order.

Chapter One

Feng Ming died.

He never expected that his life would be so short.

Usually at nineteen years old, one would prospect at building a life rather than having it end so prematurely. However, in his case he was fated to see a truck hurtling towards a small boy who crossed the road whilst completely oblivious to the oncoming danger. Without hesitation Feng Ming secured the child in his embrace.

The force of the truck's impact immediately sent him up in the air, like an angel falling from grace. As the moment of his surreal air suspension passed, all he could hear was noises from passer-bys running towards the pair.

At that moment, he knew he was dead.

Where do deceased people go?

Once Feng Ming was separated from his physical body, he reached a void, a completely empty space between the living and the dead world.

No-one could see or hear him scream. It was like he was trapped in a cold detached nightmare. Alone and isolated, his morale dropped to the point of despair, but suddenly, his ears perked at what he thought was a noise.

-“You should still be here? Am I right?”

The voice was unfamiliar. Feng Ming couldn’t associate it with anyone he might have known when he was alive, but this voice was clearly addressing him.

-“Me?” Feng Ming answered a bit frightened.

-“Are you talking to me? Who are you? Are you God? Or are you also a ghost?”

The voice chuckled:

-“No, I’m not God nor am I a ghost. I’m standing at the door of the void.”

Feng Ming’s wisped his head around to check. Out towards the far distance of his emptiness, he spotted a middle-aged man and in that man’s arms was the young boy he had risked his life to save.

The mysterious man’s mouth ever so slightly:

-“I’m actually a Sorcerer, I possess supernatural abilities. To repay your kindness of saving my child’s life, I can help you gain a life again.”

-“Are you for real?” Fen Ming was genuinely surprised.

-“Yes.” The man nodded.

-“Today’s alignment between this world and another’s perfect, allowing me to open a time-space portal from our world. I will find you another recently deceased body, which you can assume its identity. Of course, I will select a corpse that is in much better condition than your own after the accident.”

-“So... Are you saying, I have no other choice but to enter a different time and space universe?”

-“That’s correct. This is a rare opportunity. You are very fortunate to have made my acquaintance. I am your only hope in casting this portal to a different realm, where you will be able to live once more. If you were to linger in this void more than twelve hours your soul will slowly dissipate and cease to exist.”

-“Then my luck is pretty good today, I thought all dead people are reincarnated✱...”

-“My offer only stands as you’ve fortunately died whilst rescuing my child, on a day coinciding with a rare stability between our world and another. Have you decided?”

-“What is there to even think over?”

-“Well then, we’ll commence.”

-“Wait!”

-“You have something you want to ask me?”

-“If you have to find my new corpse, can’t I at least make a choice?”

-“What is your request?”

Feng Ming shot the middle-aged man an exasperated look.

-“Of course, I’d at least want to be in the place of a good person, it would be awesome if it was a young-Master.”

He paused.

-“Please, don’t put my soul into a woman’s body!! If I could be handsome, I’d appreciate it and no one shorter than five feet tall would be great.”

The man let out a sigh:

- “I’ll try my best.”

-“What do you mean by “try”?!”

-“There are some things you can never get.”

Suddenly the man's expression distorted in annoyance:

-“Shit! The time-space portal is starting to open, I need to start now...”

An abrupt flash of lightning crashed into the void, blinding Feng Ming. An onslaught of roaring wind within the darkness deafened his ears. His whole existence was enveloped by this paranormal force.

Powerless to resist the strange energy, Feng Ming's soul was consumed within the next rush of hollowing wind, which proceeded to accelerate to a storm.

-“AAAA-ARGH! AH! ARGHHH...!!!”

Feng Ming's screams were muffled as he was taken up into the eye of the portal.

His soul was ripped apart.

The Kingdom of Xi Rei

The Residence of the Imperial Palace

Within the grandest hall in the Prince's quarters, the Royal servant ladies were all looking ghastly pale.

Something was wrong with the Crowned Prince.

A rush of Imperial Tai Yi ✧ came and went. Their expressions appearing grimmer than the next and eventually all their eyes echoed helplessness.

Everyone was uneasy. Their hands trembled with each action.

The Prince was dead, and everyone who has served him will be buried alongside His Highness ✧.

-“Prince!” Wept the servants and guards.

-“Oh, Your Highness, our Prince!!”

Mournful cries perforated into the tension filled air in the Prince's quarters. Everyone's heart was suspended in despair.

-“Quickly! Go inform the Regent King✱, that His Royal Highness... His Royal Highness is...”

The teeth of the old chief Tai Yi chattered nervously as he called for messengers to relay the devastating news, which by now had already spread like wildfire.

A line of Imperial Tai Yi's had formed outside the Royal bed chamber, after failing to revive their Crowned Prince.

Each man's expression was more sorrowful than the next. Their heads were downcast in anticipation of the horrific punishment to be enforced upon the servants, once the Regent King unleashes his displeasure for their incompetence.

The likely cost would be their heads. Everyone was at the mercy of the Regent King.

Being buried alive. Everyone here was to be buried alive!!

People all around were disheartened. Several servant girls were so shocked from their impending fate they began fainting in the corridors.

The Palace was thrown into a complete havoc.

Then, suddenly an ecstatic voice exclaimed:

-“The Prince...The Prince looks like he is waking up! Imperial Tai Yi! Tai Yi!”

The Chief Imperial Healer scuttled into the Royal patient’s room, a small entourage of Court officials, high ranked officers and the servants flooded in.

All were in deep concern and disbelief of the sudden miracle. The wise Tai Yi proceeded to check the Prince’s vitals. Upon seeing his expression relax, a beacon of hope was lit, and the forlorn faces of the Prince’s subjects quickly eased.

Not long after, one of the Prince’s personal guards rushed out in joy, bellowing on top of his lungs to announce:

-“The Prince is finally awake! The Prince is awake!!”

To herald the good news, everyone in ear-shot cheered for joy celebrating that their Prince did not perish by a final slumber.

Feng Ming grimaced, his lips down-turned to the piercing headache that greeted his awakening.

Voices were bombarding him. His eyes were heavy, and barely able to open.

-“Prince?”

-“Prince?” Queried concerned numerous voices.

Where did I end up?

Many people around him persistently called out to him as if urging him to return to them. As soon as his eyes fluttered open, he was met with the alarmed gaze of an elderly old man. Behind, the greyed hair man was a couple of pretty maidens hovering over the man's shoulders.

What's with these periodic looking costumes?

As his eyes slowly adjusted to the new-found lights and sights, he was no longer shy to look around his environment.

He pursed his lips in discomfort, readying himself to ask:

-“Where is this place?”

Everyone around gasped, completely shell-shocked. Their eyes met in a certain communal fear, before an answer was issued to their Highness.

-“Your Royal Highness?” The old man asked cautiously.

-“What are you asking?”

Feng Ming blinked his eyes, and quickly re-surveyed his surroundings.

Oh yes! That's right!!

Feng Ming reminded himself that he has entered someone else's body. According to that strange wizard it should be a dead person's body. If he wasn't told this earlier and woke up to such a scene, he'd probably think he was insane.

-“I said...”

Feng Ming turned his head around, a little apprehensive:

-“Am I a Prince? A Prince of which country?”

Is this the Tang dynasty or the Ming dynasty*? Well, I guess it doesn't matter considering being a Prince sure beats being an anonymous civilian... Actually this might turn out pretty cool...*

-“Of the Xi Rei Kingdom, Your Highness.”

Xi Rei? Where is that?

Feng Ming frowned but nodded and started to nonchalantly play along, pretending as if he understood:

-“Oh, Xi Rei, Of course, I know.”

He closed his eyes for a moment to collect his thoughts. He felt a slight disturbance by a presence along

side his bedside. Three young ladies had humbly kneeled next to his side, on looking the Prince as he rested.

When Feng Ming passed through the portal, it left him with excruciating aches and an extreme throbbing in his head. The newly founded Prince dismissed his subjects so he could rest in peace.

The only people left in his bedchamber were his close personal servant girls whose were ordered to watch over him. For a while after the small gathering had disbanded, Feng Ming remained restless. He tried to sleep again but struggled.

Growing tired of the effort, his eyes flashed opened. He beckoned the closest maiden:

-“What’s your name?”

Reviewing his behaviour, quickly, he explained:

-“I just woke up and my head is a little dizzy.”

The servant smiled:

-“Even if the Prince didn’t come out of slumber you would never call my name. My name is Chiu Lan, Your Highness.”

-“What do you mean? Even, if I wasn’t ill and bed-ridden shouldn’t I of at least known something so basic?”

The servant replied once more with an even a sweeter smile:

- “Your Highness seldom spoke to us servants. I have worked here for two years now and this is the first time you’ve asked for anyone’s name.”

So if it's like that...

Feng Ming sighed relieved.

If it’s like that then, it would be alright if he doesn’t recognise people. Additionally, he wouldn’t have to work too hard on that part of remembering names.

However, being a Prince wasn’t all fun and play, according to what Feng Ming could recall from the history books. The majority of the Crowned Prince’s upbringing is occupied with stramineous training. All of which, is strive to take on the responsibilities of running a country. The recipe of studies to develop virtue, spirit and mind - Not an easy full time job, that’s for sure!

-“I don’t like talking much right?” Feng Ming’s lips stretched into a soft smile.

-“Well then, after being so seriously unwell, I think I’m adjusted to finally opening my mouth.”

Chiu Lan was patient, filling in the lapse of memory for her master:

-“Prince you were never sick, you fell into the river and you were rescued. From the moment Your Highness was pulled out from the river, you’ve had the whole Palace on edge of a sword. The imperial Tai Yi said you were beyond saving!”

-“Fell into the river?” Feng Ming emitted an embarrass glow along with an awkward smile.

-“Oh right... That’s right. Ah...I see the weather must have been good, and I decided to go for a walk near the river and I accidentally slipped and tumbled into the river. Good that you all manage to find me just in time”

Chiu Lan stared at the Prince bewildered by the man in front of her, making Feng Ming a little uncomfortable.

-“What’s wrong?” He demanded.

-“Prince, Your Highness is acting rather peculiar today.” She answered dutifully.

How could this not be strange?

Feng Ming’s heart was lamenting.

It wasn't like I was eager to jump into this corpse!! I didn't want to be your Prince!

Who told your Crowned Prince to have such a miserable short life?

Since being pulled into the time-space portal, there hasn’t been much sense in the subsequent events. But why did Feng Ming have to impersonate a “dead”

Crowned Prince? The “living” Crowned Prince sighed heavily, as he decided he will have to learn to tolerate the changes that come with assuming this new identity.

Releasing a last sigh, he decided being anyone sure beats, dying at nineteen years old and having his soul disappear for ever. He mustered up his fighting spirit and made his choice.

-“Chiu Lan, I want something to drink.”

The maidservant left to retrieve the request.

He lazily sat up on his bed, but even this slow motion sent shocks of pain that radiated from his bones and muscles straight to his brain.

Well from now, Feng Ming would quietly assume his given role as the Crowned Prince of Xi Rei.

A place he has never heard of. Nor did he have any idea what dynasty he is even present in!

He also had completely no idea what a water pitcher, cups or its equivalent would be in this place. He refrained from reaching out for items by himself, afraid his foreign reaction to every day items such as containers, utensils would illicit a curious response from himself.

Even if he was to be independent, and retrieve his own drink he was helpless to where to start. They would definitely suspect something in his unusual behaviour.

Quickly detecting him as an impostor, or worst yet label him as the real Crowned Prince that had turned insane after his accident!

In a short while, the girl returned steadily back to his chamber. In her hand was a silver polished cup and her other was a modest porcelain pitcher, which had no handle.

Chiu Lan carefully poured the refreshing liquid into the glistening cup, walked towards his bedside and steadily offered the fullness to Feng Ming.

Reaching for the cup, Feng Ming took the opportunity to study the pitcher. Letting out an inward sigh of relief, on confirmation that the domestic basics were very similar to what he was expecting. In theory, by the looks of his environment, he could treat this as the Tang dynasty.

Without further tormenting his completely parched throat, Feng Ming outreached hand accepted the cup and awarded his cracked lips as he gulped down the entire contents in one mouthful.

To his displeasure, the Prince was never expecting to find his tastes senses suddenly burning with bitterness after consuming his beverage. The liquid he had so eagerly swallowed, was just as eager to leave his stomach.

An odd sensation overwhelmed his nostrils. Feng Ming immediately clutched his chest choking on his own saliva. Tears seared his eyes as he fought with his full will not to regurgitate.

He continued to cough, to the point where mucus, tears and saliva gradually made a mix on his face.

What the hell is this? Don't tell me this is the quality of water in this Xi Rej Kingdom!?

The Prince's chest, hollowed out by the heavy fits of coughing. He could barely put right his focus straight as he tried to fix his angered eyes upon his maidservant, Chiu Lan.

The servant stood without any intervening.

How dare that girl toy with the Price, although he was an impostor he shouldn't be treated in this manner! As his coughing fit calmed down to a clearing of his throat, he expected an explanation.

-“What was *THAT*?”

Chiu Lan looked astonished at the Prince's odd question but answered obediently:

-“That was wine...”

-“*WINE?*” Feng Ming exclaimed and stared dumbfounded at the contents in her hands.

Feng Ming was only nineteen in his previous life, and not even of drinking age. He shook his head, deciding whether to forgive her negligence or blame generosity in her actions.

-“I wanted a drink to quench my thirst, you silly girl! What are you trying to do?” He scolded.

Hearing the tone of annoyance in her Master’s voice, the poor girl scrambled down to her knee’s with fright and immediately bowed as humbly as she could.

She had angered the Prince

Chiu Lan feared eyes meeting with Feng Ming and instead she produced the wine container above her head, tilting it for the Prince to inspect out of suspicion of any wrong doing.

-“But Your Highness never drinks water... Your Highness only drinks the finest wines available to the Kingdom”

-“Huh?” Feng Ming blinked, completely lost for words.

I never drink water only wine?

This Prince must have been one serious alcoholic, perhaps that's why he fell into the river!

Stupid drunkard, what a way to go out!!

The Prince cleared his throat gently.

-“H-humph... the Doctor...No... I meant the Imperial healers have advised me that drinking is unhealthy. Hence forth, I will stop drinking alcohol.”

Feng Ming adjusted his posture and straightened his back before casting a much gentler look at Chiu Lan.

-“From now, if I am thirsty, serve me water.” He stated.

-“Quit drinking?”

Chiu Lan asked several times for confirmation from her Prince. It was almost as she was talking to a ghost.

Her lips quivered as she finally answered:

-“Understood, Your Highness.”

Chapter Two

Feng Ming took a big gulp of the more palatable liquid which Chiu Lan had newly dispensed for him, followed by a gargle as he rinsed the unpleasant aftertaste into a silver pan brought by the servants.

By this time he was meant to have a meal, but felt a bout of drowsiness cloak over his mind. Perhaps it was a side effect of the wine he forced down. He released a yawn, and proceeded to sprawl back to rest on his bed.

Chiu Lan stood by his bedside and advised the frail young man with a gentle voice:

-“Prince, you should have a meal.”

However, Feng Ming was unresponsive as he already began to gradually slip away.

His aching body was blissfully sinking into comfort until he became completely aloof to even answer and not long after he drifted into a deep sleep.

Once he awoke again, the sky had clearly darkened outside. Feng Ming pondered about how the time✱ was calculated in his new environment, but by the looks of it at least three to four hours had passed.

It was a usual habit of his, to take a few minutes to sober from the daze of sleep before rising out of bed. His roommates would often give him an earful for this strange habit.

Considering his new circumstances as a Prince of a Kingdom, which appears like a joke some meddling Gods have created for him, there was bound to be at least good things. He was certainly going to make use of the entitlements that came with his Royal title.

Within his daze, he heard an unfamiliar voice mock him.

-“Well, we were all surely given the impression that he was dead but in fact this was a scheme to terrorize the Imperial Palace...such tasteless tactics!” Spat the voice rather bitterly.

Feng Ming felt the hostility in the sharp words that targeted him, piquing his awakening.

He was alone in this new world and understood that he had to carefully cover his flaws, even if it included having to implement self restraint over acting brashly to provocation such as this, so instead he chose to sensibly listen, feigning his slumber.

As a matter of fact, the owner of the hostile voice was not far away from his bedside, permitting Feng Ming to be his audience. The speaker was clearly full of disrespect and contempt towards the Prince.

-“If he puts up this act again, next time just solve the matter by delivering him his beloved wine, we will avoid such an unsightly uproar within the Imperial Palace.”

Chiu Lan replied with a hint of reservation:

-“Master* Tong, the Prince yet to awaken.”

Upon hearing such words, Feng Ming was taken aback. Since he was the protagonist in this story and cast the role as the Prince, a title of a high Noble in all Kingdoms, certainly even if he was passed out he was deserving of respect from all his subjects.

What was with this poor mannered Master Tong? He dared to be so openly and audacious with his apparent dislike towards the “Prince” within his own private room.

Judging by the volume and the tone of the voice, this individual clearly had no fear of the Prince, even if His Highness was to overhear him.

Nor was there any discontented reaction from the maids that were devoted to serving Feng Ming. There was no defence on his behalf. No one was even willing to step up to defend him as he was disparaged.

With indifference in his stride, Master Tong Yi ordered the servants one last time:

-“I’ll take my leave, ensure you keep him under close surveillance, he better not stir any more trouble.”

Just as the man pivoted from the bedside to depart, there was an abrupt authoritative voice that coldly commanded him to halt in his steps.

-“Stop right there.” Feng Ming ordered as he hoisted himself up from his rest.

This sudden demand startled the occupants of the room. The dominating manner coming from the Prince’s voice was an extreme abnormality.

The Prince’s voice had long been associated as submissive. However, today it’s was tough riddled with nerves.

Master Tong Yi gave a yelp of surprise:

-“Eh?”

He spun around to come face to face standing tall and overbearing in front of Feng Ming and raised an eyebrow.

-“After taking a nice tour to the Gates of Hell✱, it appears you’ve grown yourself some guts.” He remarked arrogantly.

Then the figure turned around and presented himself to Feng Ming, allowing him the opportunity to size up his opponent. According to Feng Ming's estimates the insolent and obnoxious voice belonged to a young man, around eighteen to nineteen years old, with lips a rich shade of red framing, nice white dentures. Overall he was actually quite a beauty.

Regardless of his attractive appearance, his poor mannerism in language was unfitting and imperious, which greatly displeased Feng Ming.

-“The one with the guts here appears to be you!”
Feng Ming condemned with an unyielding force.

Standing his ground Feng Ming mimicked the cold tone he was delivered, he leant on his bed-rest and gestured with both his hands.

-“Chiu Lan, tell him what the punishment is for the act of disrespecting the Prince.” He mandated and used his eyes to signal his maidservant.

Truthfully, Feng Ming wasn't aware of the punishments handed down in respects to the offence, especially having no idea of the history of this Dynasty he was making home to. Although Feng Ming's voice appeared rather guarded inside he was at unease, considering the outcome of his venture may not be a good one. At this point he wanted to cue Chiu Lan to cover for him. It seemed like a good move.

His casual use of his maidservant sent her in distress. Chiu Lan stared for a few moments at His Highness, waiting for a change in the odd behaviour, but it never arrived.

The Prince was especially full of spite and fighting spirit today and his eyes beckoned her for a prompt answer, so she fulfilled her Master's wish.

She abided and shifted herself to face Master Tong Yi, whose expression darkened a few shades. Both men were of high status, and she was just one little Palace maid servant, she could not afford to offend either party*. Her heart was screaming from the position she was involuntarily deadlocked in.

After much hesitation, with a cold sweat and a guilty conscious she announced:

-“To disrespect the Prince, following the laws of this great Kingdom, it is punishable by hanging.”

Simply said, it was a death sentence for assaulting the dignity of Royalty. It looks like this Kingdom highly values the pride of the Royals. As he heard the result, Feng Ming could calm down, as he had the upper hand.

With a sincere smile he pressed on:

-“Well, this person here, shouldn't we be taking him out to the gallows?”

Master Tong Yi had a notorious history of insolence towards the Prince and he had never suffered any reprimand for his ill-manners or actions.

In fact the real Prince had always tried to avoid confrontation and remained a constant victim to bullying. Today's events enraged the young man, how dare that incompetent fool dare to condemn him and make him accountable of his "mistakes?!"

The young man was on the edge of releasing a fit of rage, a normal reaction towards the useless Prince, this was often the victor forcing the Crowned Prince to surrender to his oppression.

Just as he was about to let loose, he caught the fiery gaze of the Prince's large dark eyes, surging with control over him. Which triggered the reality of the truth behind the words exchanged, the Prince was none the less part of the Imperial Family, and treading on the Pride of the leader to be of the Kingdom was a rightfully punishable criminal act.

Even if the Prince scolds him, if the man was to order servants to carry him out and take his head, no one would be able to intervene.

Throughout the years, Tong Yi had never been made to feel the disparity of status and identity between the two. He was shaken to have this "Prince" suddenly threatening and defiant alive and kicking.

With much hesitation, he dropped his gaze yielding to the man with more power, withdrawing his pride momentarily and pleaded:

-“I have offended Your Highness. May the Prince be generous and forgive me and my actions. ✱”

Once that sentence was concluded with such courteous words, the serving maids in the house all stood with stunned faces.

What on earth was this?

Was the Prince the main actor for a play?

Feng Ming bowed over, not expecting such an outcome and was foreign to how he should properly react. Without putting much thought into it, it wasn't like he was ever going to take action upon his words and send Tong Yi to his demise. So instead, he composedly nodded his head to grant a pardon.

-“So be it! I'll forgive you today.” He offered a concession calmly.

Biting his bottom lip in pure scorn, Tong Yi was welling up with anger inside. Hearing the casualness from his pardon, he lifted his head to throw Feng Ming a piercing glare.

Who would of thought, that there would be a day Tong Yi would have to “submit” to this incompetent Prince? Tong Yi felt like a complete laughing stock, he could just hear the people mocking him. At his weakest moment, he had been stripped of his prestige and power by that pathetic being.

Without any further exchange, he retreated and marched angrily out of the Prince’s Halls.

Seeing the rather disgruntled Tong Yi leaving hurriedly out his space, Feng Ming motioned to Chiu Lan.

-“I’m hungry. I haven’t eaten anything, could you serve something to me now?” He asked weakly.

Chiu Lan’s eyes darted back towards the door and beyond before returning to her Master.

With a shaking voice Chiu Lan spoke quickly:
-“Prince, you have deeply angered Master Tong.”

-“So what? Challenging the Prince.

-“I haven’t even made him accountable for his actions. I didn’t even get angry at him”

And considering our statuses, the one who should be angry here should be me!

-“But...”

Chiu Lan has witnessed the oppressive life the Prince had suffered. However, his actions today was flourishing with dignity, who knows what tomorrow may bring and how much her Master would pay for the costs of his recklessness. She has been serving the Prince for two years, so she had developed an attachment to her cold master. Her expression soured at the thought of the possible outcomes.

-“In the case Master Tong Yi informs Rong Wang ✱, how are you going to handle the repercussions?”

“Rong Wang? Rong Wang... Who’s that?” He queried with little interest.

Feng Ming saw the colour drain from Chiu Lan’s face, quickly realizing he asked a foolish question, but to cover his mistake he reminded her of his earlier misfortune.

-“I fell into the river, you remember? It looks like the water filled my brain, I’ve forgotten about a lot of things!” He exclaimed.

With a long blank look, Chiu Lan finally relinquished the information just going along with her Crowned Prince.

-“Oh, I see the Crowned Prince has lost part of his memories. Well, Rong Tian or Rong Wang is Xi Rei’s Regent King. He is currently in charge of the government and military power of our Kingdom”

*So it's like that... There's a Regent King in my stead
to govern the Kingdom.*

Acting in this charade, certainly hasn't been as easy as actors have made it appear on television. Let alone having such a heavy burden to pose as an important figure in this Kingdom's society!

Feng Ming did not want to make any more callous mistakes, so he retired his questions and switched his attention to his surroundings once more, looking around with dull interest upon his face.

In a short while, his supper arrived.

Feng Ming had vividly imagined an exquisite banquet of delicacies that filled a whole table to be served to him in the grandest feasting style fit for a King alike in movies. Sadly, it was wishful thinking, as instead he was presented with twelve assorted modest dishes that were neatly left on top of a table in his room.

He soon realized he couldn't underestimate the effort placed into each plate, as they were all intricately designed with carved decors created from fruits and vegetables.

Feng Ming picked up his chopsticks with a bit of apprehension. If he had been given more warning about his days to come, he would have at least absorbed as much history books to get a grasp on Royal eating Etiquette. It was too late to lament, regrets or no regrets.

He was better off taking the challenges as they came speeding towards him. He might as well exert his real self to properly integrate in this world

Anyway, I'm a Prince! Even if I act uncouth, it's highly unlikely anyone would casually scold me for my ill manners. Maybe...

As he just bit into a slice of bamboo root* he had selected from one of the closest dish, he felt the presence of Chiu Lan inch closer beside him, her eyes unmoving from his body.

He looked up unknowingly, his vision still a little fuzzy and asked his maidservant:

-“Chiu Lan, Have you eaten yet?”

-“Your Highness should quickly eat and not concern your greatness with such a lowly peasant as me!” She replied.

Feng Ming wanted to invite her to sit down beside him and eat together. He was tinkering on how he should deliver his invitation so he cunningly disguised it as a suggestion.

-“I don't have an appetite eating by myself, how about we have a talk?” He eagerly motioned the chair beside him and encouraging her to take a seat.

Chiu Lan thought desperately, how could someone of her background dare to share the same table as her Master? She was no one of equal prestige. She lowered herself courteously to ask for a pardon and excused her inability to join him seated.

-“If the Prince requests my companionship in a conversation, I will oblige” She winked and asked:

-“What is it that my Prince wish to hear about?”

What a great opportunity!

Feng Ming was swamped with the boundless questions he had for her.

-“Considering I’m rather unoccupied, how about giving me a comprehensive summary of my matters, give me a good round up, how about that?” He smiled.

-“My Prince, are you not aware of your current affairs? With such a case, that you are consulting me?”

Chiu Lan’s ongoing impression of an ‘out of character’ Prince was furthered by his strange request. She was quite young, so she couldn’t resist breaking into a small giggle which she made sure to cover her mouth with her hand.

“This is...” Feng Ming eyes flickered, and he explained:

- “I want to know how the people, my subjects, really see me in their hearts. Do you know anything of that sort?”

-“Yes, I will inform you then.” She promptly answered.

Throughout the two years Chiu Lan had served as a maid, she was generally in charge of basic chores such as pailing for water and tending to clothing. Never had she had a chance to develop a close relationship with the His Highness and to the point where she could share a casual discussion.

She couldn’t help to find their situation amusing, so she had a lot to say as she thoroughly explained the coming and goings of the Xi Rei Palace, each story increasing with detail.

The current country was separated into different sub-kingdoms, and there were endless feuds across the lands. As a whole the country had been divided into twelve states-kingdoms each with their ruling fractions.

Once Feng Ming heard this fact, he immediately thought it was worst than when China was in the Warring State of Seven Era ❀!

The Prince was King Xi Rei’s only son. It was only seven years ago the Ruling King suffered a stroke, which he then entered a state of unconsciousness, and never awoke.

Xi Rei is still ruled by an Imperial regime, which has been passed from a lineage of Royals. However, the Royal rule has been suspended and handed over to the Regent King. This man, Rong Tian has the power of the Kingdom in the palm of his hands.

When Chiu Lan spoke about Rong Wang, there was a rather uncanny fear and shyness to her words. Her sentiments reminded Feng Ming of the girls back in his old reality that pined over idols and Pop Stars with the exception that Chiu Lan was more subtle.

Initially, the painted impression in Feng Ming's mind of the Regent King was a stout and evil tyrant ruler. But judging Chiu Lan's fan girl like expressions, he could not help to wonder and reconstruct his portrait of the Regent King.

Who the hell was this Regent King? Is he some kind of Mega handsome man of this era that made maidens swoon?

-“So who is this, Master Tong Yi?”

Chiu Lan was eager to divulge to her Prince. The young maid was quite ecstatic for her rare roll of storyteller to her Master. But upon hearing this particular request, her face stalled momentarily. The hesitation followed an odd glint in her eyes.

-“Concerning Master Tong Yi... Well, he is a nobleman, with Rong Tian Wang...”

She was abashed to continue the next words that were to pursue, so she quickly followed:

-“He appears to have a good bond with Rong Wang.”

This statement triggered Feng Ming’s curiosity:

-“He has a good friendship with the Regent King? How does he tolerate him...?”

Still bitter about the previous ordeal, from the unruly arrogant attitude he was served, Feng Ming could only assume that Tong Yi was Regent King’s precious baby brother, or perhaps a close relative?

-“This is what the servants believe, it might just be gossip. Actually I am not sure there’s any confirmation about this.”

Not knowing what to say next, Chiu Lan quickly changed the subject in panic of her out of line interjection. She cleverly used the excuse of reminding Feng Ming grooming duties.

-“The Prince has spent a long time feasting, the night fall has arrived. It would be advisable to take your bath now and rest soon”

Feng Ming accepted the suggestion letting their conversation come to an end so he quickly shovelled down his rice and allowed his servants take care of the dishes.

He stood up to stretch out his back, frowning and supported himself with the table. The aches continued to linger, he wondered whether they would ever go away he continued to internally curse the time travel portal. Shortly, his thoughts were interrupted by two pretty maidens.

-“Your Highness, Prince, please take your bath now” Speaking to him with a clear calm voice.

He had a rather blank expression. Although gave a nod of his head he remained stationary. Even if they inform him that his bath was ready, it wasn’t like he was running off anywhere! What direction was he meant to head off to? What about his change of clothing?

A rather embarrassing thought came to mind, when Feng Ming recalled all those television shows he had watched. Didn’t a large group of maidens tend to the Royals regardless of sex in the bath? Would they be standing by? Wouldn’t that be like giving them a free show!?

By this time, Chiu Lan had already cleared his table, and he wasn’t sure where she had disappeared to. As the two maids looked at him wide eyed in anticipation, Feng Ming remained lost for words, trying to find the right thing to say to delay the time.

-“Ah, you two, what are your names?”

It appeared to people that the Prince was developing some kind of liking to greet individuals. The two servant ladies had bewildered looks on their faces and looked at him strangely before replying.

-“Your humble servant is called Chiu Yue”

-“This loyal servant is called Chiu Xing”

Feng Ming gave a false confirming nod of his head:

-“Chiu Yue?” “Chui Xing? Both are indeed good names, well named.”

Feng Ming’s out of character antics prompted interest from Chiu Yue. She hid her face as she covered her mouth as she laughed softly before raising her gaze to her Master.

-“It is quite late now, if His Highness could head towards the baths. Or else the water will be chilled”

The usual Prince was very mild mannered, he never threw fits of rage however it appeared like his personality was rearranged. He was acting so generous and actually striking conversations as well as eliciting smiles. Chiu Xing and Chiu Yue were only modest young servants and very innocent, seeing the Crowned Prince converted to treating them so gently, they didn’t hesitate to help him. They tugged lightly on his sleeve and ushered him towards the baths.

Feng Ming was completely stumped on how to react, as Chiu Yue willingness to guide him was good to get things rolling along. So he followed without too much resistance but an awkward smile remained painted across his face.

The Prince's Bathing Quarters within the Palace turned out to be one completely constructed of stone. Steam floated from the pools in streams of humidity and the bath itself was easily the size of a small swimming pool. It was surrounded by screened walls, which were covered with decorative silk cloths, creating a very relaxing atmosphere.

A towering pile of clothes was resting atop of a jade table next to the pool. Feng Ming drew his conclusions, guessing that these were garments prepared for him to replace his old robes.

-“Please Prince, take your bath when you are ready.” The two girls excused themselves with a slight bow, whilst trying to refrain from chuckling as they retreated.

As he watched the pair leave, he let big sigh of relief. How fortunate that the events didn't end up how he had rolled out in his mind. The idea of having someone cater for him was outrageous!

He stared eagerly at the bath tub, which was tempting him to quickly disrobe and get cleansed.

This was the first bath in this kind of place, and given everything he has been through he was going to ensure that he was clean as a whistle by the end of it.

It was almost like he was going to rinse himself free of his past.

Feng Ming was orphaned as a small child in his own world, and he was very grateful for the life he was able to live. He lived very carefree and studying consumed most of his energy, so dating was out of the picture until he graduated from College.

As he began to strip, he inwardly cursed who had appointed his outfit. The impatient Prince peeled off the ridiculous amount of layers one by one.

Surely if everyone in this Kingdom wore this amount of clothing, they'd spend half the day just stripping!

Feng Ming continued to bicker to himself and was glad when he was down to the last article, a simple under-gown which he did not stress to remove quickly.

Finally, he had finished taking things off! Time to hop in and scrub down! So relieved!

That was... Until a gasp of air was knocked out of him, when he tilted his head down south his eyes widened like a deer in headlights. He was in utter shock at the bare sight before him.

The young man was completely astonished to discover, upon his legs and chest were countless welts and fresh cuts that decorated his skin. They were accompanied by horrible bruises and he could even make out marks what appeared to be left by slender whip lashes. There were obvious teeth marks as well as assorted shaped marks left by unknown perpetrators.

No inch of skin was unmarred the scars and wounds littered his slender body simply everywhere! He was stunned at the abuse, taking the breath away from him.

Feng Ming held his breath as he bravely parted his legs. Upon verification he stuck out his tongue in disgust before quickly clamping his legs shut. The tender flesh between his thighs were also painted with bruises, even such a private place did not escape the assault.

Does that mean, someone was abusing the former Master of this body? Knowing that he was the Crowned Prince of Xi Rei!? Or perhaps His Highness had a fetish for S&M!?

No wonder his body seem to be weighed down with pain, regardless of the rest he had. Feng Ming had blamed his ache on the time portal travel ...But in fact...

-“Were you waiting for me?”

In his moment of confusion, he was hit by a sudden intrusion. A man with a deep voice suddenly made his presence known.

Feng Ming was utterly surprised, that a stranger had entered his perimeters then he remembered the state of his body, unsightly with injuries and naked, he quickly scuttled towards the pile of clothing set aside for him.

Desperately throwing on the garments as fast as possible, his sudden burst of messy stress resulted with his footing weakening beneath him, leading to an embarrassing fall straight into the bath tub.

Submerged within the water works, he frantically waved his arms. Splashing and displacing at least half a pool of water along the way. What a complete moron, falling into the pool barely clothed!

-“Heh Heh Heh...”Came a dry laugh.

It was a complete embarrassing mess! Soon Feng Ming composed himself, he straightened up and prepared himself to condemn the uninvited guest that scared him half to death and indirectly caused his pitiful state.

He found that the chief instigator had already sneakily entered the room.

-“You sure are gutsy to dare spy on the Prince taking a bath!”

There was a lack of confidence in his authority whilst he reprimanded the intruder. It sounded no more than an empty threat.

Feng Ming moved cautiously, backing away towards the side at the same time he was trying to cover his modesty with the wet garment he managed to pull down with his fall.

Unfortunately for him, there were the uncontrollable laws of physics working against him and buoyancy wasn't helping his cause, the continuous flow of fabric refused to give him the coverage he needed as it floated innocently around him. In the end his embarrassment could not be blocked off to wondering eyes.

The uninvited stranger had a handsome face with a rather defiant look on it, and there was a certain glint of evil within his eyes. At that moment, those eyes looked down at him, an empowering force that oppressed him, staring intensely at the bare body.

-“Well, it appears you’ve grown some courage, actually daring to use such a tone to talk to me.” The man chided.

The man playfully raised his eyebrow slightly and teased:

-“I hear you had a nice fall into the river, and when you were pulled out you were a little insane, even to the point of reprimanding Tong Yi. I’m guessing that

you haven't headed so deep into insanity that you can't even remember who I am..."

Who is he? So bold, and acting so casual towards royalty? Poor manners!

Then it struck Feng Ming's mind, and he blurted out:

-“You are the Regent King!”

The corner's of the man's lips uplifted, before they parted coolly:

-“It seems you do remember. And I thought you had assumed playing the role of a madman”

With that said as the next second passed, the man violently jumped into the bath, leaving no time for Feng Ming to escape from his grasps.

The smaller man felt like he was hit by a large momentum, the man eye's locked down on his own. His frame was pushed down hard and rendered helpless. The shield he had used to cover his body was ripped from his hold and thrown aside by the stranger.

-“His Royal Highness, has certainly matured even contemplating and daring to commit suicide?”

There was a level of darkness behind the taunt, making Feng Ming unconsciously shrink backwards. Without warming, Rong Wang's large steel-like fingers wrapped themselves around the boy's delicate throat.

-“I never said you can take your own life.” He angrily stated.

-“Nnnh...”

Feng Ming’s trachea felt like it was going cave in to the force, the pain etched on his face as his muscles contorted under the strain.

He managed to wrap his hands around the larger ones that were threatening him. But found it futile, as his strength slipped away completely. His efforts were in vain, there was no chance of ripping the relentless hold.

Even if he wanted to for a chance of a second’s breathe. His lungs were started to sear with pain, air deprivation signals shot towards his brain and the Prince felt his vision to blur.

Feng Ming was apprehensive in his mind, was it really true that Regent King wanted to end his already pitiful life by strangling him?

This whole dying and living business, he didn’t know whether to make it laughable or pitiful!

He had just acquired the new body, which was actually his destiny to relive the experience of to dying again.

Chapter Three

As the excruciating pain of being strangled subsided, numbness quickly inched in. Around him the intense atmosphere gradually calmed down. Feng Ming's eyes flickered wide open, blood surging through his brain.

Death's voice had welcomed the young man when he had once again dangled too close to the end of his life's thread.

It was at that very moment Rong Wang decided to release his vice-like grip around his delicate throat. The pair of large cruel hands slowly retracted from the slender neck.

Expressionless, the tyrant watched Feng Ming's mass sink into the depths of the water. Almost immediately, the young man's survival instincts triggered. His weak hands sought desperately to grasp onto the edge of the pool to stabilize his body.

Droplets of water poured from Feng Ming's face which was painted with confusion.

In past this type of meaningless cruelty had often been inflicted upon the Prince, even to the point where the body would submit and cry for mercy.

Even so, it was a barbaric method to employ such a shameful technique on another just to demonstrate one's own dominance.

Dark sharp eyes quietly observed the blank-faced Prince. As he met with those familiar pair of eyes, Rong Tian had a discovery. As if a precious jewel that had gone unnoticed was unearthed, sending his own heart to race.

What is happening?

The usual Prince carried himself as stupid, introverted and a largely disgraceful excuse for a Prince whom no one acknowledged. Why does he emit such a strange aura now? What happened to the regular grovelling submissions and begs for mercy?

This new situation was appealing to Rong Tian's amusement. He decided to shelf his cold approach for the moment and instead deciding to close the distance between him and the Crowned Prince. He lifted the chin of the younger man, allowing him to clearly study the boy's face.

There was no doubt about the Prince's familiar face that his own peered down onto. Sadly, looking at the Prince could only rally the thoughts of how pathetically worthless he was aside from the astounding beauty he possessed. A beauty that could be admired but served no purpose one could akin the Prince to the delicate and elaborate art that decorate pillows.

Upon the naked body was evidence of his marks, welts and lash traces of a few days old. The image of the spineless Prince cowering pitifully freshly played into Rong Tian's mind.

However useless the person was, he had a magnificent body. Rong Wang grabbed the young boy by his slim wrists, fraying the limbs out so he could savour the view. Although Rong Tian had a healthy share of countless women, none of them could ever endure the degree of punishment he inflicted only on the Prince. The boy's body provided an entirely different category of satisfaction.

Oppressing the Prince was the same as controlling the wide plains of Xi Rei, anything that can be taken from his hold could just be as easily retrieved by his power.

This incompetent Prince...

There is a degree in how unsettling it was to how one could not deny the alluring attraction of the Prince's body.

Perhaps if he wasn't the obedient Crowned Prince dominated in his own Palace and rather a male prostitute in one of the city of Xi Rei, wouldn't he have better opportunity to demonstrate his value?

Rong Wang's had whole heartedly committed himself to eternally despise the man in front of him. However once he had his first taste of the Prince's sweet intoxicating body, he was captivated. He was a prisoner to his own desires.

He lifted the boy who was still in a state of stupor, setting him upon the cool surface of the marbled surface beside the pool.

-“Did this little drowning episode scare you?”

Rong Wang knelt on one knee, partially hovering over the other, coolly continuing his survey of the unguarded body from head to toe.

-“Don't you play coy with me. I won't be giving you special treatment.” He threatened rather smugly before pinching the Prince's cheek.

Feng Ming started to become more alert as his consciousness was returning, thanks to the icy chill seeping through his bare back rather than the unsolicited pinch.

At the very moment Rong Wang had released his tight hold, his fragile body began to slip into the water.

Perhaps his body caved from the strenuous time travelling after-effects, causing Feng Ming to temporarily lose control of his newly acquired body.

During that mental slip an overpowering emptiness returned in his mind, momentarily stripping him of his senses of the world around him, as if he was thrusts back into another time and space portal.

Fortunately, after a short disconnection with reality, he recovered from that darkness but his mind consequentially remained in a haze.

The spiteful words that spouted from Rong Wang failed to register to Feng Ming who waved in and out from reality and barely absorbed a word. Poor Feng Ming wasn't even aware what sequence of events there on after had lead to him lying upon the bath's stone cold floor.

His bare body was taken from the warmth of water, directly onto the cool surface of the room. It wasn't the ideal comfort, as he gradually seeped out of his stupor, Feng Ming moaned softly. With effort, weary eyes fluttered open and focused themselves.

-“What are you doing?”

Finally he was clear on their current circumstance, Feng Ming could not command his body and he could barely muster his voice to speak.

Rong Wang's hands, continued explore the naked body, caressing the muscles to help them loosen, however there was an overtone as if he had ownership over this possession and it was solely his.

If it was not for the tell-tale glint in Regent King's fierce eyes, Feng Ming could have been easily tricked into believing he was offering kindness to massage his aching muscles.

Feng Ming raised his hands in attempt to control the unwanted fingers exploring his body which were wreaking havoc by each second.

-“Stop!”

-“Oh?”

Rong Wang smirked, easily brushing away Feng Ming's obstructing hands and pinned them both back behind the younger man's head. Leaning and closing their proximity, Rong Wang gently bit Feng Ming's lips.

-“Does His Royal Highness, wants to demonstrate his strength today?”

Suddenly his expression changed, instantly unmasking the man's dark intentions.

-“Are you planning to mess with me again? Do you want a beating?”

Despite feeling like his detained wrists were about to snap under his captors hold, Feng Ming eyes flashed wide open and defiantly glared at the Regent King.

-“You dare to treat the Prince this way?”

-“Isn’t this always the case? Why are you only feeling like this is unjust treatment today?” Rong Wang laughed cocking his eyebrow.

-“You” Feng Ming eyes averted from his, infuriated as he held down his anger.

Wasn’t the situation clear? Although he had the chance of being ‘Reborn’ made a Prince, stunningly attractive and no shorter than five feet in stature.

He entered an Imperial Palace which had a messed up hierarchy. Only to be bullied by Tong Yi and the devil of a Regent King himself, who had the real power, to the point where the real Prince is degraded to the level as a main dish for the Regent King to consume.

From previous inspections of his newly acquired body, Feng Ming could deduce from the shameful lashes and marks and the Regent King’s behaviour that the Prince was a delicacy that was often eaten.

The adventured packed prospects of travelling to a new place had originally made his rebirth enjoyable, being able to experience time travel and all, but now he was confronted with the reality of living the rest of his new life as a play thing, a complete slave to another man’s carnal desires.

No, no, this is ridiculous!

-“Idiot! Let me go!” Feng Ming’s face ushered in a colourful range of expression, realizing the real crisis at hand, he shuddered and gulped as Regent King’s face blocked his own.

-“You dare to scold me?” Rong Wang raised an eyebrow amused.

He opened his mouth with no hesitation and moved towards the Prince’s own. Completely taking him by surprise as he ruthlessly caught the younger man’s red lips where he started biting down with his teeth.

-“Nnh”

Those full lips felt the sting, Feng Ming was completely unguarded and he gently sobbed out under the hold. Faint tang of blood registered in his senses and the taste eventually reached his throat, all the result of Regent King biting him until blood flowed.

It could not be for real that he was going to taken by a man!

Feng Ming gathered all his might to evade the vicious teeth biting onto him, he barely slurred his disgust

-“Let go...I don’t want this...

-“Damn it....”

The pain never ceased from the origin of his lips. The doings of this barbaric Regent King who was disinterested in heeding to the Prince's request. Instead he deepened his rough kisses and focused on drawing pleasure by exploiting Feng Ming's flushed lips. Soon, the taste of blood became stronger, as its metallic essence overwhelmed his senses.

Feng Ming accepted that his struggle was futile against the older man. He tossed his head from side to side attempting to throw the King off his swollen lips, as well as attempting to voice his protests.

Wasn't there a saying an eye for an eye?

With this wonderful proverb in mind, Feng Ming stopped his escape and in its place he sank his own teeth onto Regent King's lip in return. He abruptly widened his own mouth before issuing the element of surprise to his bully by biting down as hard as he could.

Let's see who is fiercer now?

He continued to clamp down with brutal strength reassuring his attacker there was no love involved, and determined to leave his own stamp of revenge.

The sudden act had genuinely startled Rong Wang. He wanted to move away but was already snared. The wound where his lips were bitten sent sparks of pain

willing him to abort his mission. This “Prince” meant business!

Highly skilled and trained in Martial arts since his childhood, Rong Tian had immediately acted on a transient response. The Regent King’s hand snapped into action, and without any hesitation knocked the back of Feng Ming’s neck firmly with one swift movement.

-“Ah!” The sharp contact at the base of his neck jolted the younger man, who instantly loosened his hold on the man’s lips.

Rong Wang rose up from his position in a split second, his immediate leave relieved the pressure on Feng Ming’s body and his hands were freed. The Prince had his physical freedom restored.

The flow of events of their confrontation was acted out in a few short seconds. Feng Ming didn’t even have the luxury of prompting himself up from the harsh floor before Rong Wang pounced on him again, this time slamming Feng Ming’s body down with his sheer strength.

A pair of intense eyes alit anger burnt holes into Feng Ming. Rong Wang gritted his teeth:

-“How dare you bite me?”

The lips that had previously only offered cold and smug words were now a blood extravaganza. Everything that happened today was beyond Rong Wang’s expectations. The prisoner under his solid grip had not

submitted to him or shiver with fear whilst choking back tears.

Instead, the Prince's usual eyes that avoided contact with others, suddenly locked onto his own. There was no evasion in the set of eyes that appeared alit with angry flickering flames.

Feng Ming pushed the aggressive and physically superior male away, his eyes glowing with indignation, threatening the Regent King.

-“I'm warning you, though my hands, and legs are incapable and my body is weak and aches, If you dare do anything to me, tomorrow I will...Tomorrow I...”

Feng Ming's threat was unfinished as he felt himself slip into the emptiness, his vision darkening.

Bastard! I haven't finished!

Damn time travel! Damn the stupid Prince that let this abuse onto this weak pathetic body! I didn't even have a chance to finish!!

With numerous complaints and pains, Feng Ming allowed the darkness to swallow him, falling into a deep sleep.

Waking up his head was curtained with sleep, his eyes fluttered open to set upon the antique and luxurious roof above. His mind lingered there as he recalled what had actually happened.

It was tragic. And the terrible thing was that the problem was still present and persistent.

Once the handsome face of the Regent King appeared hovering over his own, Feng Ming verified how incorrect his initial profiling of the Regent King was.

What he discovered in this position of power was not a plump and balding old man. Instead from his estimates he was probably around the same age as he was in his previous life.

The difference was the tremendous air of power that surrounded him. Regent King's presence mustered up fear and made people shiver. Such a characteristic is befitting to play the villain on a television show, right? The Regent King embodied the stereotypical tyrant who has it all, a handsome face and an entire empire in his hands. Under his godly appearance there was nothing but evil.

-“What is on His Royal Highness's mind?” Rong Wang mocked him.

This extremely contemptuous attitude only proved to further demonstrate how impertinent the man behaved towards the Prince.

Feng Ming glanced around his surrounding.

His personal attendants were standing quietly at the side of the room. Even Chiu Lan did not intervene. No one was willingly jumping into defend their Master's mistreatment.

It seemed that the Regent King was un-officially the real ruler of Xi Rei Kingdom.

The Prince that had been raised in the Palace was merely a play thing. The harassment by the Regent King most likely forced him to take the final option, as he willingly to jump into the river, whilst unknowingly giving Feng Ming a second chance.

-“I'm asking you.”

Feng Ming's chin was suddenly tilted upwards by Rong Wang who addressed him as if he was just a lowly servant.

A fuse inside Feng Ming's mind cracked. He was infuriated not hiding his annoyance as he whipped his head away from the Regent King's direction.

-“Humph! Cao Cao*!”

-“Cao Cao? What is Cao Cao?”

From the response of the treacherous King it was obvious that he has never read “Romance of the Three Kingdoms✱.”

Not even bothering with the duty of explaining what Cao Cao meant, Feng Ming realised a more important issue. He twisted suddenly to stare intently at the man.

-“I’m going to ask you... Yesterday... Did you... Do anything to me...?”

-“...”

-“...”

With an audience of attendants in the room, it was an embarrassing word he dare not say publicly.

The Prince was rather interesting today, the words he spouted were intriguing, and he no longer was the grovelling coward that trembled in fear and sought safety. Rong Tian bore his eyes into the young boy’s tense expression. A growing amusement by the events grew. He lent down close to the Prince’s neck, mimicking Feng Ming’s tone.

-“Gee, did I... or... didn’t I?” He teased.

-“You...idiot!!”

Feng Ming set forth an attack, releasing a raging tiger behind his outburst. Looks like the training he received from the guards at the orphanage paid off.

Like a flash of lightning, he landed a sweet one square onto the Regent King's face. In a blink of an eye the arrogant and handsome man sported a new fresh bruise.

Rong Wang was completely taken by surprise and this was clearly reflected in his facial expression, the whole room had immediately felled silent.

No one could have anticipated this type of fast paced action to develop between the two men. The collective response of their audience was of shock and nothing more. All the faces in the room paled, the attendants left in a silent flash gone before you could even notice the click of the doors shutting behind them.

The single blow was successful, and planted straight onto Rong Wang's precious face. However, Feng Ming knew his actions were out of line.

It wasn't like he advocated the use of violence. Growing up he was naturally stubborn, with a child like a little demon when it came to defending his pride or having the last word. He wasn't the type to skip out on payback just because of physical pain with scars and bruises instead he always ensured he evened the score.

Likewise his opponent today was the Cao Cao of this era, the Regent King had dominance over him but he wasn't going to sit back and submit to humiliation.

-“You hit me?” Rong Wang exclaimed.

Rong Tian dumbstruck with the Prince impertinence immediately began to recalculate his perception of him.

-“Yesterday, you bit me and I haven't even settled that account with you. And today you actually dared to raise your hand against me?” He spat in disbelief.

The hands that fumbled to hold a cup of tea, the Prince that would tremble just by his mere presence, was this even him?

Feng Ming shook his head aside before further demanding an answer:

-“Enough! Tell me! In the end, yesterday... Did you force me...? Did you do *it*?”

-“It's not like it was the first time, why should you care?”

It can't be...

Feng Ming pupils contracted, his fists clenched like he wanted nothing more to give the man another taste of his fists.

However, Rong Wang chimed in casually:

-“But I’ve never enjoyed a dead fish. Frankly I have never been interested.”

The punch Feng Ming almost released needn’t take place to his relief.

He bitterly replied:

-“Well, that was a wise choice.”

The Prince was astonished to the fact his rebuttal came without the cost of infuriating the man, instead the Regent King actually laughed.

-“If you have other questions, why don’t you ask them all now?” He offered suspiciously.

Feng Ming didn’t fall for the abrupt change of goodwill. He, of course, had countless questions he wanted to ask, but at the present, he just wanted to be far away from this abominable Cao Cao.

The farther the better he would be.

-“There is nothing to ask, you can leave.”

Feng Ming very consciously optioned to address himself as a Prince would.

Instead of retreating, Rong Wang leisurely declared:

-“If you’ve finished with the questions, now it is my turn to ask.”

His tone was frivolous and so was his choice of words, an under tone of authority ensued as if he was setting a trap.

-“Ask me? What is there to ask?”

-“Firstly, who are you?”

The voice wasn’t flippant anymore it came across as icy. Feng Ming was startled.

-“Me?”

With no time to react, Rong Wang had him under his hold within a split second. Feng Ming’s slender wrists were once again caught by a stronghold of larger hands that pinned them above his head, rendering him completely helpless.

Rong Wang whispered and his breathe rasped gently into Feng Ming’s ears:

-“You’re definitely not the Prince, *who are you?*”

-“I am the Prince. Feng Ming desperately claimed.

In a situation like this, he had to keep his mouth shut and stick with his identity. It wasn’t like a farfetched story of his spirit taking up the Prince’s body would spare him from being executed.

-“You are the Prince?”

Rong Wang sneered:

-“You are obviously unfamiliar with the Prince, you are riddled with flaws! How could the Prince have enough courage to bite me or even dare to raise his hands against me?” He accused.

-“Don’t claim that a mere jump into a river would cause these major changes in one’s constitution and personality. I am the one who is most clear on what the Prince is really like.”

-“Confess! Who sent you?” The Regent King demanded.

Chapter Four

-“No one sent me!”

Feng Ming had difficulties regulating his breath under the clutches of the Regent King’s hands, his own hands sought immediately to guard his throat.

-“Still so hard headed?”

Rong Wang’s hold tightened, his hands stiffening like robotic claws showing how serious he was, The grip nearly caused Feng Ming to fall under a fainting spell a second time.

-“Speak! Where has the Prince gone? How did you manage to sneak into the Palace? Are your associates within the Palace?” His demands bombarded the “fake” Prince.

Feng Ming had just awoken, his body was impaired by physical fatigue, under such a forceful hold, let alone an appeal for justice, keeping his breathe was a difficult task, he could only manage a snort of defiance.

Rong Tian was alert as he looked at the young man, deciding he would not resort to killing the impostor, instead he sneered and relinquished his hold.

Monitoring Feng Ming, who gasped like a fish out of water; his chest and airways bellowed desperately. With only a few mouthful of air to relieve his discomfort, his collar was firmly snatched ruthlessly in the man's hands.

-“Be obedient and confess. You will suffer less.”

Feng Ming stood his ground and angrily lashed out.

-“What do you want me to confess?” He defended.

Such a disloyal subject, treating a Prince in this manner! My luck must be rotten to get stuck as a mere scapegoat.

-“Say it! Where is the Prince's location? Did your men capture him?”

-“I am the Prince!” Feng Ming insisted raising his voice.

If it was possible, he wanted to dish another throw at the Regent King's despicable face.

Rong Tian fell silent as his expression darkened. He sized up his opponent for a short while, before finally releasing his grip on the collar.

-“You say you’re the Prince, what is your evidence?” He interrogated.

Feng Ming snapped and glared.

-“You accuse me of not being the Prince, what evidence do you have?” He countered.

-“The Prince would never dare to speak like you towards me.”

Rong Tian paused for a moment, before asking:

-“The Queen's birthday was last month, what did you send her as a gift?”

Feng Ming drew a blank. How the hell was he to know what happened last month in these shoes?

His large eyes darted around as he struggled to weave an answer:

-“I, as a Prince, am thoroughly occupied each day, how am I meant to keep track of exactly what happened last month?”

Rong Wang looked at Feng Ming strangely, making him fear what was to come.

-“During the day before yesterday, the Prince and General Lin had a discussion, what was the topic?” He attacked again.

-“Since it was a General, if the topic was not concerning the military, then it would have been matters of the country, we had discussed some trivial matters as well.”

-“Ha ...Ha, Ha” Rong Wang’s head snapped back chortling.

Feng Ming found his response rather discouraging.

Rong Tian stopped smiling, as he re-focused on Feng Ming:

-“The Prince never met with General Lin, considering this was just the day before yesterday surely you couldn’t forget what happened?”

Unbelievable he actually walked straight into such a simple trap! Feng Ming cursed himself for his stupidity!

-“There is something else...”

Rong Tian’s eyes burned eeriness. His tall body gradually closed in on Feng Ming, an enormous air of oppressing befell the Prince.

-“His Royal Highness, has been addressing himself as the “Prince”, a practice that the real Prince doesn’t carry out in his every day speech patterns.” He pointed out.

It couldn't be...

Without warning, a wet tongue flicked at the curve of Feng Ming's ear. Feng Ming practically jumped out of his skin.

-“Could the Prince forget his own name?”

Feng Ming couldn't stand the proximity of the Regent King, consciously backing away in retreat but immediately struggled, as Rong Wang's arms firmly embraced and imprisoned him.

-“Now be a good boy and tell me where the Prince is. Tell me everything that you know, otherwise... Your beautiful body might not be able to tolerate my punishment.”

Their bodies were entwined together forcefully by the older man, their bodies intimately against each other, using a gentle tone to deliver a cruel threat.

Feng Ming tossed his head aside:

-“What is so strange that one would forget their name? I fell into the river, scared myself half to death and forgot everything.”

The thought of being thrown into a prison to be punished and tortured did elicit fear in Feng Ming's heart. Avoiding the question, he manoeuvred the topic back to his side of the court by inquiring how he was at fault.

-“From head to toe, which part of me isn’t the Prince?” He scoffed.

-“Heh Heh,” Rong Wang darkly chuckled at the comment, before tearing open Feng Ming’s clothes at the collar, nodding upon inspection.

-“Correct, you are a fine imitation, these scars and bruises are strikingly similar, rather impressive”

Slender fingers brushed the enticing delicate skin and began their course of brazen strokes.

-“Let go!”

Feeling his dangerous predicament, Feng Ming stiffened, twisting his body in an attempt to escape the Regent King’s violation. His captor stood unmoved behind him, as he remained trapped.

-“Are you trying to seduce me?” Rong Wang’s voice was low and hoarse, flirting with his prey by blowing into Feng Ming’s ear, tickling him.

-“No, no! Absolutely not!” Defended the Prince.

He calmed down within the hold to avoid the unwanted misunderstanding, to stop the Regent King misinterpreting his actions. Feng Ming was a modern youth, he wasn’t completely ignorant about sex and all things related.

After realizing his struggles were sending out the wrong signals and worse, heading towards a direction, he froze on the spot. He stood stiff as a plank of wood in the arms of the Regent King.

The sudden quietness that washed over the feisty young boy surprised Rong Wang. He turned his focus downwards to examine the bounty within his arms that he should be most familiar with. However, he was mesmerized by a new and strange attraction that the young man emitted.

At seventeen-year-old, one was already considered a grown man in Xi Rei. Until now, the Prince had always been vacant alike a clay figurine. However at this very moment, Rong Tian was amazed to find his clay figurine brought to life by the Gods, and given a new soul. Even if he was a lowly assassin, compared to the original useless Prince, he was more likable, right?

-“If I had you tossed into jail, you wouldn’t be able to survive one night of torture.”

The Regent King’s gaze burrowed, roughly grabbing the boy’s hand hissed:

-“Each fingernail will be ripped out slowly, and pins pushed through until you bleed and your hands become mutilated. If a person does not confess, then molten iron will be poured on top.”

Rong Tian’s description had Feng Ming scared to wits end, sending shivers down his spine.

-“Do not threaten me!” He spat.

Rong Tian actually didn’t set out to scare the young man, seemingly his words were spoken in consideration for one thing he had in mind. His eyes glazed over the length of the young man’s body.

-“At that time you decide to confess, you would no longer be human but a lump of mutilated flesh, a lifeless shell. Wouldn’t it be more interesting to employ another method instead?” By this time, it was as if matters had been settled, so a smile crept on the Regent King’s lips.

The younger man hit him as hard as he could:

-“Hey, I am the Prince. You can’t casually throw me into a prison just so you can torture me to your heart’s content.”

Just as he finished his sentence, a coy smile slipped over Rong Wang.

-“You are the Prince? You can be the Prince if you want to. He is my little bird I keep caged within the confines of the Palace and only heeding to my orders. That’s right, the Prince’s name is “An He”, and you should remember it.”

Feng Ming was stumped his eyes caught the man’s face. This terrible man, clearly knew there was something wrong with me what is his reason to allow me

to retain this identity? Regardless, the young man managed to survive the passing storm.

Feng Ming let out a sigh of relief before reiterating the name:

-“An He, An He. I’ll remember it. Well, hurry and let go of me.”

Considering the Regent King had verified his position as the Prince, he might as well show the attitude of one.

-“Let go?”

The Regent King studied the animal trapped within his folded arms, who could easily be thrown into a jail cell at any moment was in fact having the nerve to be ordering him. He laughed at the situation.

-“Don’t forget, I’m the one in charge here. Even if you were the real Prince, he will be obedient and listen to me.”

-“You’re just a Cao Cao! You are just an evil shadow puppeteer stealing the throne, exploiting the Prince for your twisted lusts!”

Not heeding to the insults, the Regent King’s fingertips snaked upon the curves of the younger man’s chest before brushing his tender nipples.

Goosebumps rose from Feng Ming’s skin, and he shouted a chain of uncivilised names at the King.

-“Oh, I’m shadow puppeteer who wants your throne? You are well versed with words, rather cultured mouth you have there, I commend you.”

He chuckled, before placing his lips over Feng Ming’s. The Regent King’s forceful hand weaved into his long hair, taking grip to tug the boy’s head backwards, bringing the young man’s face closer.

-“Hmmm ... mmm....”

Warmth from the lips crushing his seeped through, his jaw loosened unwillingly as an external force pried his mouth open. Feng Ming’s dark eyes fluttered wide open, larger than a set of surprised cat eyes.

Oh my God, this man, he... he was ...

Inside his mouth, Feng Ming was too stunned to comprehend the war he was meant to fight, as the foreign tongue violated his mouth. He had lost. The persistent tongue rendered him in a dumbstruck condition. His brain completely detached from the turn of events.

This was all messed up.

Rong Tian kindly released him for a moment, it only then it hit home to Feng Ming that he was kissing a

man. Although this wasn't his first kiss, it was the first time he had a man kissing him.

Feng Ming decided to blame his shock for the kiss that happened as he stupidly stood like a doll.

-“You shouldn't be giving me such a devastated expression, right?” Rong Tian provoked, as he lifted Feng Ming's chin to face him.

The odd response he received from the boy made him feel delighted. In many countries, assassins are trained strictly, including ones which would infiltrate by the means of a bed chamber and sharing the sheets with their targets. Learning important skills to ensure they can get close to their enemy.

Rong Tian preferred that the young boy was inexperience in that respect.

A kiss between men isn't anything special. Everything will be okay...

Feng Ming sought to comfort himself. He looked the Regent King bitterly in the eyes, and he immediately retracted that thought.

If the person who had just assaulted your lips, looked like they haven't finished what they are doing then you are in deep shit!

Add to the equation the embarrassing marks and bruises all over his own body, it was not hard to picture what was ahead for him.

Those large dark eyes fixated on Rong Tian's, and gradually revealed the desires the other held. The younger man's heart cried out, screaming alarm and managed to conjure up an unknown strength to break free from his captor.

It was only seconds before he managed to scramble to the other side of his bed.

-“Do not come any closer!” Screamed Feng Ming, as his hands scoured for a makeshift weapon in a hands reach to defend his virginity.

Unfortunately, there was not even a pair of scissors to be found in the Prince's chamber.

Rong Wang was fascinated as he watched the young man scrambled to clasp his hands around a little silver jug.

-“If you dare to come near me, I will make sure this cracks on your head!” Feng Ming threatened.

With the poor choice of weapon Feng Ming clutched both hands around the jar, ready for an attack. However in the next second his only protection loosened from his grip as he was unceremoniously thrown onto the soft bed.

The poor Jug was readily thrown out of the window by Rong Tian.

-“What a strong man ...” Rong Wang ridiculed his tone openly mocking the younger male.

Feng Ming was pressing his luck, as he shot a warning glare to the Regent King whilst baring his gritted teeth.

-“If you mess with me, I will bite my tongue immediately to commit suicide.” He threatened.

What a joke, if he was going to be raped by a man, he was more than happy to be dead.

No more humiliation!

-“Don’t be afraid, my good Prince.”

Rong Tian gently caressed the side of the Prince’s chin as if soothing a child, stroking carefully to calm his agitation.

His voice was magnetizing drawing him into his pace.

-“Tell me your real name.” He beckoned.

-“What?” The Prince remained collected.

-“Tell me, and I will let you off today.” He prompted, giving irresistible offer.

Will it really be so?

Feng Ming closed his eyes, measuring his situation and calculating the outcomes. It appeared that he couldn't play the Regent King any further.

Considering he already knew that he was a fake. There was no harm in giving a name, although under these circumstances it wasn't a glorious trade, it was better than being raped violently.

With his mind made, Feng Ming opened his eyes and replied slowly:

-“My name is Feng Ming.”

-“Feng Ming? Feng Ming...” Rong Wang contemplated the name a few times before bowing his head down onto Feng Ming's ear.

-“My name is Rong Tian, you should remember it.” He whispered.

There was no hesitation as he initiated another round of passionate kisses, engulfing his prey as he started with the ears his lips never breaking touch as he extending skilfully onto the full lips, gradually increasing the depth in their connection.

The tenderness refused any rebelling, as draining all of Feng Ming's energy to put up a resistance.

Even though he was off the hook today, Feng Ming was well aware if he didn't satiate the man he wouldn't leave.

He grieved for his destiny, knowing his body was too weak to put up a fight. He voluntarily closed his eyes and obliged to satisfy the tyrant as fast as he could.

Concluding he was better off pretending that the Regent King was a woman. Feng Ming closed his eyes, imagining he was with a girlfriend, eagerly delivering her his passion by deepening their kiss.

A fire erupted within as an ecstasy tantalized his hot mouth in waves, the feeling surging one after another creating a fuse of tranquilizing pleasure.

Honestly this guy's technique is not so bad...

Chapter Five

To Feng Ming his regimented life in the Palace officially began. He had no choice but to comply with the cumbersome Court Etiquette required from him. For certain he wasn't given the respect and treatment a Royal Bloodline Prince should receive, to the contrary, everyone treated him like he was an important prisoner.

From the gossip Feng Ming manage to catch, the original Prince was really pathetic, a complete useless thing. Apart from drinking, all he did was play and upon seeing the Regent King he would succumb under his power and crumble like weak bones.

It wasn't a secret within the Imperial Palace that the Regent King violated the Prince, there was yet to be any sympathy from the people around him.

-“What a bastard... Argh.” Feng Ming muttered, bored out of his mind as he sat in the Prince's Hall, he looked up and sighed.

Chiu Lan stood beside Feng Ming, staring at her Master with a confused expression.

-“Chiu Lan, didn't you say the Regent King will come here today?”

-“On this matter... Of the Regent King’s whereabouts, your lowly servant dare not speculate.” She replied dutifully.

-“Humph!” He groaned.

Unsatisfied he turned away from her.

All his servants when speaking on the topic of the Regent King showed admiration and fear of him. Yet, they were indifferent with sharply noticeable attitudes towards Feng Ming.

Was this Cao Cao that good? The original one was merely a treacherous figure in Chinese history.

He abruptly stood up, and dashed to the door where Chiu Lan immediately followed to block his exit.

-“Prince!” She cried out.

“Where does the Prince want to go?”

-“I’m bored to death here. I’m going to start rotting soon!” Feng Ming growled gingerly, before quickly breaking the barrier and ran out of his quarters.

Three seconds later, the imperial soldiers that stood guard outside of his area had him restrained in their hold. They returned him to his place with his temper flaring. The guards were also impatient with Feng Ming’s incompliant behaviour in the past days.

Giving their respects to him they pleaded with him:

-“Please forgive us, Prince. The Regent King has issued that there is potentially spies from other countries infiltrating Xi Rei Kingdom, and we have been ordered to increase security and protect the Crowned Prince. You can not override the Regent King’s orders and leave your quarters.”

-“I’m not a prisoner!”

Even though Feng Ming raged on childishly, the guards politely excused themselves and closed the door to the Prince’s hall tightly shutting him in.

In the past few days this scene has been repeatedly played, all resulting the same way.

Feng Ming was bored senseless, sure an ancient Imperial Palace was extravagant and beautiful but even so, sitting day after day in such tranquil ornate surroundings would lose its appeal.

There must be a thousand secrets behind the walls of the Palace, fun things that were to be discovered. However, none of his servants were going to brave the crime of allowing the Prince to roam about for the sake of his curiosity.

Even if people stood up to authority on behalf of the Crowned Prince, his rank did not carry any prestige.

Feng Ming kicked the foot of his bed in frustration. He was desperate, even the sight of his enemy was a cure to his dreary regime.

-“My brain will explode from boredom, how come that Master Tong Yi hasn’t even dropped by?”

In fact the only interesting thing to happen took place the day before yesterday, when Master Tong had rushed in rudely, and picked a fight with him by initiating a war with words.

This of course resulted in their comical and uncivilized scuffle. The two were clearly untrained in terms of martial arts.

His attendants could only look at each other in dismay, none of which interfered. Everyone knew the authority standing behind Master Tong Yi and no one wanted to lay a wrong hand on the heir of Xi Rei. Not aiding either was the best choice they had.

Master Tong Yi had no clue to what the Prince had taken as drugs, within a blink the Prince before him was no longer a coward afraid of his death, instead the weakness was replaced with defiance. Tong Yi stormed out of the Prince’s Hall cursing uncouthly.

Soon after he made his way to complain tearfully about what happened to Rong Tian, who never even considered the Prince as anything and treated the Royal Prince like a slave.

Instead of getting the Regent King to side with him, he found himself reprimanded for his actions. Rong Wang warned him sternly, and since then he dared not appear in the Prince's quarters.

-“Don't tell me, am I going to be trapped here for the rest of my life?” Feng Ming asked as he watched Chiu Lan as she entered the room, bringing his dinner, and he began to frown.

Given that he may have a chance to see the nasty Regent King again, was good enough to hold onto the thought of serving him two more punches which will sure beat the boredom of being stuck in his room.

Ever since their impassioned kiss, the Regent King approved the status of Feng Ming's identity, threw him into the Prince's Halls and left him to peril.

Just as Feng Ming left out another disgruntled moan, he heard voices outside his chambers announcing an arrival.

-“Rong Wang, I wish you good health.”

When that Cao Cao was on his mind, that Cao Cao really appeared.

How amusing this event immediately cheered him up, his body flowing with vigour. He covered his mouth quickly, pulling himself together as he held back his joy, before getting up.

Rong Tian pushed the doors open and entered in a fashionable manner, quickly confronted by Feng Ming who was pumped with passion to pick a fight, he was lively and glowing standing shorter than the Regent King and close to where he had entered.

-“Oh, aren’t you lively.” He chuckled.

Rong Tian paced slowly towards Feng Ming, then identifying the alert in the younger man’s eyes. He decided to stop one step short of the Prince.

He glanced to the sides of the room, and ordered:
-“Everyone step down, leave us.”

Everyone, inclusive of Chiu Lan, wordlessly retired, shutting the doors to leave them in privacy.

Silence cloaked the room. A strange feeling radiated from that silence. The sudden change in the atmosphere affected Feng Ming. He couldn’t help but feel a timid.

This Regent King isn't planning to do something to me again... Could he?

Last time he managed to escape by revealing his true name, perhaps he could offer his three measurements to settle this deal? ✱

There was a deep darkness in the eyes that fixated on Feng Ming. Quickly the eyes that held an aura of an oppressive force closed into him. Soon there was a weight that leaned into him which yearned to constrict him.

Jestingly, a grin formed on Rong Tian lips, he insincerely feigned his Courtesy towards Feng Ming:

-“His Royal Highness, your humble servant has arrived to wish you well.”

The Regent King’s breathe blew into his ears, causing him much distress. As Feng Ming moved away, he found himself falling into the hands of Rong Tian.

Into these large hands that practiced martial arts, familiar with immobilizing and enforcement, they soon had Feng Ming’s slender wrists effortlessly tied behind the boy’s back.

-“Hey! You can’t treat a Prince this way!”
Exclaimed Feng Ming.

He glared at the man and was clear of how strong he was. His intentions to land a few punches was better placed aside at this rate.

-“Hey, Hey... Little Prince” He flicked Feng Ming’s Chin towards his face to carefully study it.

Being with the Prince for so many years, Rong Tian had already vented his desires on the delicious body. But he never actually stopped to seriously take in the Prince's appearance.

For the first time, he wasn't looking into the face he despised so he saw what had been there the whole time. Immense beauty, the Prince's face was attractive, handsome and amazing. The boy's features enticed admirers to take claim, with kisses.

Since their memorable kiss that shook his core, Rong Tian could not erase the existence of this impostor from his mind, nor hid him away from the Prince's quarters.

In all his powers he had ensured that any suspicious individuals within the Palace were investigated. However, he could not determine the origins of this Feng Ming or information on his identity.

Feng Ming was a beautiful name in itself. *

-“Feng Ming ...” The name rolled off his tongue, in an alluring deep voice, bellowing gently on the Prince's eardrum.

Then he ordered:
- “Call my name.”

His name?

Feng Ming was stupefied and gazed at the Regent King. He did recall that the King had told him his name, however during that moment he was attacked over and over again. And he was hit with that fervent kiss. How was he meant to remember his blasted name...?

Rong Tian waited silently for a response, his expression change into one not so friendly, firing danger.

-“What?” Feng Ming prompted.

-“Did you forget?” Rong Tian accused.

-“Or did you not even try to commit it to memory to begin with?”

The dial of anger flicked up another notch. The thought of his name being forgotten by this man, added fuel to the fire as his rage was beginning to boil over and there was nothing to stop it.

Rong Tian’s name, spoken around the eleven countries was already enough to send people trembling in their shoes, hence no other Kings thought of him lightly.

No one had ever acted in this manner, completely ignoring his importance.

-“So what if I forget? Seriously, what is the big deal?” Protested Feng Ming as he talk back, not knowing he was further adding to the damage done and now was just adding that extra spoon of fuel to the fire.

Without noticed, his elegant lips were crushed brutally with a pair of possessive ones. The mouth over his worked to suffocate him during their kiss, his act was how the Regent King wanted to demonstrate the power he had over the younger man.

How he could slowly savour the boy however he wanted to enjoy him this was including ravaging Feng Ming's tongue. It was extremely sweet, the boy's essence.

The excitement from their last kiss had elicited a crazy desire that was not ordinary and it was impossible to suppress. The past few days, Rong Tian craved and thirst for more knowledge of the one in his arms.

Where their lips locked was numb and the taste stroke a nerve within Rong Tian, firing signals to his crotch. His desires had his member rise almost immediately.

It wasn't the first time he violated the Prince, however this time around there was a new sensation of primal attraction, a passion behind it all.

After their vigorous kiss, Rong Tian threw Feng Ming onto the bed, his eyes full of dangerous intent which was on the verge of breaking out.

The Regent King was barely able to keep the reigns of control over his needs of his rather "healthy" body.

-“Are you aware of what the Prince’s responsibilities are?” He asked and hinted as he slowly motioned to remove his offending articles of clothing.

-“The most important one is to please me.”

At this moment, it may be more honourable to review Feng Ming outright.

It was just moments before the couple was deep in their kiss, which had Feng Ming well distracted. He barely manage to sit up in bed as he turned his head towards the Regent King’s direction, to only have his eyes met with the strong physique of the Regent King.

He gasped.

-“What are you doing!?” He screamed.

In fact he didn’t even need to ask, he already knew what will be the Regent King’s next step.

Feng Ming forced smile, thoughts shooting through his brain at the speed of light.

-“Just because I forgot your name? Don’t you think you are getting too excited over this matter?” He protested.

It seems like telling the Regent King his three measurements wasn’t going to be his escape ticket for the day.

Rong Tian finished discarding his clothing and stood proudly, showing his body, stepping ever so closer to Feng Ming. His face was carrying a smile as he chuckled, almost like a hunter homing onto his prey and that poor animal had nowhere to hide.

The undeniable havoc in the older man's eyes sent Feng Ming's heart beating rapidly. Seeing that the Regent King would reach him soon enough, the Prince threw his hands in front of him showing his discontent.

-“Stop! Stop right there!” He yelled.

Rong Wang paused in front of Feng Ming's eyes which were riddled with dread. Perhaps there should be some fore play beforehand, a little game of cat and mouse before the main course?

-“What is it?” Rong Wang raised his eyebrows hoping for the fine suggestion of a game.

Am I to lose my virginity today? On top of that, losing it to a man?

Feng Ming understood there was no way he'd win and weasel his way out of this by picking a fist fight with the Regent King, but if he doesn't even put up a case of resistance, he was consequently going to be raped by this man. He would be the butt of all jokes in the imperial Palace the next day for sure.

I am a modern man and modern men should be smarter than the ancient folks, right? What can I do in my ability that can out smart him?

Whilst conjuring up options, Feng Ming kept the Regent King's movements under close observation, just in case he decides to pounce on him unannounced.

His neurons working a hard sweat, trying to remember what he has seen before that may help him, but this was dominated by images of David versus Goliath.

What was the best way to deter a man, when he wants "that"?

On the side, Rong Tian had already lost his last strand of patience, as he stood butt naked in front of Feng Ming. It was better to be stripping the boy and having him in his arms so he could ravage him.

-“Come, we can get more intimate.”

The Regent King stepped forwards, determined to strip away the obstructing heavy garments the Prince wore.

Upon the contact of the man's hand on his skin, Feng Ming shrank back as if he was burnt and cried out:
-“I got it! I know now!”

His cry was ecstatic, his outburst brimmed his face with joy he was practically dancing.

Taken aback, Rong Tian stopped in his tracks and asked curiously:

- “What comes to mind?”

-“I can’t tell you. Not a word!”

Feng Ming giggled for a while, but restrained himself as he couldn’t reveal his master plan. So he changed his joy into a sullen seriousness and sternly looked at the Regent King.

-“You said my job is to please you, correct?”

-“Yes. With your body” Bluntly returned.

-“No, no, satisfying people with one’s body is too common! How about I use another way to pleasure you?” he opted.

-“With something else?” Rong Tian was aching to have Feng Ming.

-“Your mouth?”

-“No!” He exclaimed.

Seriously was that all he thought about? Feng Ming inwardly cursed the Regent King who was only filled with lust and other dirty things.

Instead, brushing off the Regent King, he laughed.

-“Have you heard of One Thousand and One Nights?” The Prince asked.

-“No.” Disinterested.

-“That's good then. Well, let's say I am a princess, and you're an evil King that marries a bride every day to only have her beheaded the next morning. From now on, I would tell you a story every day... Before I finish you can't...”

As excited as Feng Ming was setting the terms out of his deal he was never able to finish it.

Owing to the fact, Rong Tian could not control his needs, and smothered the lips ferociously that refused open under his pressure.

Chapter Six

Feng Ming was ambushed by a momentous pressure, stripping his voice from being heard. He became passive, as lips locked, teeth knocked and tongues entwined. The atmosphere around the pair, immediately heated full of sticky excitement.

-“It’s been a good few days since I’ve touched you...”

Rong Tian’s voice was deep and sensual, which took an instant for his intentions to be clearly exposed to Feng Ming.

The younger man had initially threatened the other with his most vicious glare he could offer but in the moment of his attack he was lost and only could manage to look helplessly into the large handsome face before his eyes.

That handsome face was also painted with a determination to win, with no hint of hesitation. Everything that was in his reach, as long as he wanted it, would easily be his.

-“Nnhh... Nnhhhh... Hey, you...”

Don't tell me I'm going to lose my virginity now?

Alarms rang in the Prince's brain, his body tried to fight back the impending force.

Rong Tian's tongue violation intensified within his mouth, flirting with the boy as if he had taken claim on the body.

What can I do!?

His brain was a complete mush. Given his current circumstance, pinned down with no where to go Feng Ming's survival instincts could only conjure a plan to attack the unguarded soft tissue.

His defence called for desperate measures. He practically put his plan forth as he prepared to clamp shut on a bloody attack targeting the Regent King's wondering muscle.

This long and intense kiss would allow him to catch his attacker off guard. Would he actually succeed with his calculated heartless strike?

Sadly for Feng Ming, Rong Tian by now had veteran's experience, upon the sudden movement in Feng Ming's jaw there was a disturbing glint in the Regent King's set of dark eyes.

It was a close call, sensing death the foreign tongue darted out of the cavity that could have lead to his demise.

-“You want to bite me?” Rong Tian raised his eyebrow before hit by the sight gushing trail of blood from Feng Ming’s swollen lips.

Colour drained from Rong Tian’s face. His large hands snatched up Feng Ming’s collar and along with it a limp body and roared angrily.

-“You’re actually committing suicide?” He raged.

Compared with the precious Prince, although sharing the same beautiful face, Feng Ming was extremely stubborn and unyielding.

-“Somebody! Call the imperial Tai Yi!”

Dark red blood still streamed out like it was coming from a faucet.

Rong Tian pulled violently at the Prince’s robes commanding the near unconscious body fiercely:

-“You aren’t going to kill yourself! Do you hear me?! I haven’t given you permission to die.”

My tongue hurts... I didn't sever it did I?

Feng Ming was worried about that problem but at least he happy managed to retreat from the Regent King’s advance one more time.

A Thousand and One Nights was an epic fail, and now he was going to reap the rewards of his plan to sever a tongue. Although he didn't get the Regent King's, he was complacent with his small achievement of evading the man.

He wasn't going to clear up what happened to the Regent King, it was his own misunderstanding. It was all because he managed to suddenly react to his strike that Feng Ming ended up accidentally injuring his own tongue.

Tai Yi rushed in within moments of the Regent King's angry outburst, after treatment and dressing on his wound, Rong Tian was sour and lost interest.

It was a success, tonight finally ended with Feng Ming's escape.

Coming at a cost, with his tongue heavily bandaged and throbbing painfully in his mouth, all he could do was closed his eyes obediently for rest.

The next day, news of the Prince's tongue being gravely injured by a bite spread like wildfire across the Palace. Officially the injury was the result of the stupid Prince biting himself whilst chewing his food.

Privately between the servants and gossipers, it only aroused rumours on what drugs the Prince was on to have refused the Regent King's demands, what disobedience had warranted Rong Wang reprimanding him by biting his tongue into a bloody mess and sent his tears pouring.

The stories weaved around the event were colourful but no one could contest as a witness. Rong Wang was not yet aware of the ridiculous rumours spinning around the Palace.

Feng Ming's move last night, uncapped the cork and he completely lost his calm. Whether it was a male or female, he had never been confronted by someone who was so willing to choose death than to be ravaged by him.

He had a powerful status, talent with the sword and literature and gifted with an extraordinarily handsome face. Who would refuse to be under him tossing and turning and sharing his bed sheets in pleasure?

There were those who feared his abilities, but more of those who were vain and greedy who pledge their loyalties to him.

Last night, the obviously fake Prince-assassin had bit his tongue without the slightest hesitation to attempt to end his life.

The sight of the warm liquid from Feng Ming's lips tipped him, he was genuinely furious, probably the most he has ever been in his life.

Originally, he would have punished him through a thorough beating and in everyway violate the boy, ravaging his physical desires until Feng Ming would submit to him and learn that he could never disobey his orders.

The pair of strong-willed eyes that glared at him, even through the pain of nearly severing his tongue had remained fearless and vindictive. It was like being starred at by a juvenile leopard of the wild.

This unswerving determination, yet fragile beauty was an unfathomable fusion.

Rong Tian was clear, that Feng Ming was still growing. The person before him was just an immense masterpiece waiting to become fully fledged beauty.

After spending more than half a night thinking over the matter, Rong Tian decided not to use his initial technique to approach his little assassin Prince.

How did normal people treat each other? This situation was almost like a manager in human resources organizing workers.

With a few new ideas and game plans, the next morning the Regent King immediately headed off to the Prince's Quarters.

Meanwhile, in the centre of the Prince's bedchambers, Feng Ming was under close observation of his maidservants. They surrounded him as he woke up from slumber.

The Prince before them had grown a backbone out of no where. He had the nerve to resist the Regent King and for that he had been given this cruel punishment. This was earning respect that had never been issued to the previous Prince who could only weep weakly under Rong Wang's body.

-“You Royal Highness, Prince should get up.”
Chiu Lan his trusty head servant swooped down to help lift Feng Ming up.

-“Ah...?”

His tongue was terribly swollen, doing his best to ignore the pain and say a few disconnected words.

-“Tai Yi has advised us that you are not permitted to eat. You can drink plain Congee✱, and after two days you can consume fruits and vegetables.”

Lukewarm Congee was served.

All the pairs of eyes that was fixated on his fragile form remained stumped to how the usual mouse-like timid Prince, could pose a threat to the Regent King and what prompted this drastic change to his temperament?

As soon as Feng Ming had a spoonful of the tepid rice porridge in his mouth, he shrieked at the pain that shot up from his wound. His face bunching up to the pain and he frowned, drawing in quick successive breathes to control and ease his suffering.

Damn it! This is all this Regent King's fault!

The resentful train of thoughts continued until they were interrupted by an arrival. Who it was immediately reached Feng Ming's functioning ears

-“Rong Wang, I wish you good health”.

Speak of Cao Cao, and he arrives every time!

An energetic and graceful Rong Tian was a rare sight first thing in the morning within the Prince's confines. He was extravagant, presenting himself in his Court robes and heavy boots. The Regent King's overwhelming stature was evident and he radiated virtue. Unarguably he was an attractive man with strong vigour.

If he was born in Feng Ming's day and age, how many girls would be mesmerized by him and swoon over him like crazy bitches in heat?

Feng Ming watched as the Regent King approached him, a distasteful sourness welled from his mouth just upon the sight of the man.

What kind of crap luck is this?

It was alright that I had to put up with a Cao Cao, but to encounter one that has superstar status was just insane.

Rong Tian abruptly paused directly in front of Feng Ming. Those well-toned arms wanted to pull the smaller man into a tight embrace and smother those lips with his own.

But he suddenly reminded himself of the life-endangering resolution the little assassin had made, so putting aside his bedside manners he casually asked:

- "Has your tongue healed a bit?"

- "Does it still hurt?" He sounded sincere.

Feng Ming remained in silence, he didn't want to speak.

Rong Tian averted his face slightly, looking at Feng Ming's mouth had lit a flame inside him. The younger man's injured mouth, and the fact that he had

disgracefully rejected on his sexual advances sent him rearranging his morals.

His first time seeing the impostor in daylight, triggered the thoughts of how charming and intelligent he was compared to the original, by hundred folds, additionally, the pair of strong willed eyes full of unparalleled beauty.

To even compare Feng Ming to the original Crowned Prince was blasphemy, pure injustice.

During this moment, all Rong Tian wanted to do was to spend his day in the Prince's Quarters, so he could spend a whole day just to look into those pair of dignified eyes and just to see what crazy antics the boy could get up to. Unfortunately, the country of Xi Rei had numerous pending important issues waiting for him to resolve.

-“I'll be leaving to discuss official business. Behave yourself and don't stir up more trouble.” Rong Tian cautioned.

Rong Wang had sat down opposite to the Prince, and stared at him intently for a long time, before finally standing up to take his leave.

He was quite reluctant to part before proclaiming:
-“I will come and see you again tonight.”

What?! AGAIN?

Hearing the self invitation, Feng Ming's eyes immediately dilated shooting a death glare aimed at the Regent King.

Firstly, you threaten and interrogate me just for my name. On the second you make me bit my tongue, and the third time... Do you need me to brandish a knife to castrate myself to keep my virginity, right?

This disturbing line of thought even gave Feng Ming a bout of shivers.

Rong Tian sensed the thoughts trailing in the Prince's mind, perhaps it was because his emotion was clearly painted on his face. The Regent King chuckled.

Deciding at that very moment he would detached how he treated the "original" Prince to this "new" Prince and treat him as a separate person. The malice he had preciously used and his forcefulness towards Feng Ming dissolved.

He was in a good mood, and in a surprisingly gentle voice he offered:

-“No need to be scared, I'm not forcing you tonight.”

After he finished, he nodded lightly as if confirming his agreement before leaving.

Aside from Feng Ming, even his servants were completely bewildered by the sudden show of kindness

and puzzling wind change to Rong Wang's attitude. Today, it was the Regent King who was exceedingly strange.

Everything started with the peculiar changes in manners with the Prince, and now this craziness had jumped onto their most feared idol.

Even though, Feng Ming was extremely unwelcoming to the idea of the Regent King giving him a booty call, he knew he could do not prevent it. There was nothing that could be done, considering who decided he was the ruler of Xi Rei?

When the night fell, Rong Tian sure enough upheld his words and came.

-“I only finished up my official Court duties, I haven't had a proper meal throughout, so I will dine here.”

As soon as he made his appearance, he ordered the servants to serve his dinner.

Do I have to eat with this guy?

Feng Ming believed he wouldn't be able to stomach the food in his presence, any signs of appetite completely waned. He slumped down, completely dispirited.

Rong Wang took no offence rather he smirked at Feng Ming's honesty. The young man not hiding his discomfort and distaste of being accompanied by him.

How could someone so expressive become an assassin?

He'd be a dud in terms of hiding emotion. Perhaps the only reason he was picked was accredited to his uncanny resemblance to the real Prince.

-“What? Don't you want to dine with me?”

The Regent King didn't understand how, but just sitting with Feng Ming plucked his heart strings, he felt carefree. It might have being the demanding matters he had to deal with all day wringing out all the energy he had, but Rong Tian believed he found an interesting source of refreshment for all his fatigue.

He practically had to catch a firm hold of Feng Ming before forcing the boy to sit at the dinner table.

Rong Wang was very interested in savouring the delectable food the highly skilled imperial kitchen had prepared.

-“This dish here of chopped green onion and duck pastry is made with a young duck of two months which is separated into a clean cage, fed nothing except a bowl of marinating sauces. Allowing the juices to naturally seep into the meat before it is prepared by lightly frying it in a mixture of flour and green onions. It is a rare delicacy and the taste is distinctive and unique”

Although, Rong Tian was clear on the fact that Feng Ming had been handed strict rules to only drink porridge, he none the less could not resist playing with the impostor.

Sitting cruelly to describe dishes before him and explaining how it was prepared. Worst of all he entailed how each of them tasted.

Feng Ming with his belly full of dull repetitive meal of Congee, only smell the aroma of the tasty looking duck in front him. He could not help to turn and stare, knowing he won't be eating any of it any time soon as he could only painstakingly swallow his saliva.

Catching the younger man's reaction, Rong Tian let out an audible hearty laugh, his eyes infatuated with the cute manner the boy conducted himself, as he was providing more than just a momentary muse for the Regent King.

From the inside and outside of the Prince's Hall, servants stood shell shocked with what they heard. The usual solemn Rong Wang had suddenly burst out laughing.

Hearing Rong Tian's laugh ridicule him, inflamed the fever gauge in Feng Ming. Stirring the fire of endless hatred, all he could do was so glare angrily at the Cao Cao with his eyes wide and as threatening as he could.

Considering his display of displeasure was becoming regular after travelling through the stupid time

portal, his eye widening exercises to send out death glares was used at least ten times a day, and nearly all of them are directed to the one responsible and sitting in front of him.

Chapter Seven

The flirtatious expression Feng Ming was showing Rong Tian made his heart thump harder, distracting him from his laughter as he brought his demonstration to a halt.

The Regent King's dark serious eyes hinted at admiration and appreciation reserved just for Feng Ming.

Although Feng Ming was a man, he couldn't help but to blush under the inescapable gaze that held him, especially when those eyes were framed by such a powerful and handsome face.

The fact that the same set of eyes, had previously inspected every inch of his body including his most private parts, as well as the tell tale marks scattered ubiquitously across his skin, his heart started to rapidly beat.

-“Feng Ming.” The face before him called out.

-“Ah?!”

By the time the Prince heard his name, the man scared him as he was practically next to him.

-“What...” His injured mouth managed to say.

The Regent King suddenly smacked his chest loudly, and asked in a frightening tone:

-“Do you remember what my name is?”

-“A-ahh...” Hesitation was clear.

Seriously, that’s the worst question that Feng Ming could hear from this mad man’s mouth. Considering last time when he failed to provide and answer he provoked a rage which left to in his current miserable state.

Feng Ming bit his lower lip as he racked the brain cells that were still functioning to draw out an answer.

-“Unn...Rong...” Who was he kidding?

-“Rong...”

Feng Ming cast a quick glance to see the Regent King’s reaction.

Please God, do not make me pull out a knife to castrate myself!!

Rong Wang’s long narrow eyebrows knitted together in irritation.

As expected, he doesn’t even remember my name...

-“I’ll repeat it, my name is Rong Tian.” The Regent King coldly said.

-“If you forget again, I will punish you.”

Feng Ming chanted the name as if it was of holy importance.

Rong Tian, Rong Tian... I better not forget or this guy will go insane.

He repeated the two words in an endless loop in his mind just for good measure.

It was obvious what was ticking in the Prince’s brain and his action undoubtedly made Rong Wang satisfied. The icy stern face broke into a warm smile.

One could describe the change with spring flowers breaking through the ice of winter.

Feng Ming’s eyes were fixated, completely arrested by the smile presented to him from the evil Cao Cao. Even the devil could look this good when he grinned.

If he really was from Feng Ming’s day and age he would be a complete lady killer, without a doubt milking the cash flow by being one hell of a gigolo.

-“Feng Ming, let’s have a talk.”

Rong Tian sat beside him, his eyes glued onto the impostor.

How should I treat this little assassin?

He was obviously an assassin and following protocol Rong Tian should have thrown him into a filthy dungeon to be tortured.

However, when he had set eyes on such a lovely appearance and become infected with his rather playful personality, he would conclude how pitiful it would be to destroy him.

Was this attractiveness just an act, his specialty as an assassin? Perhaps this impostor wasn't as simple as he presented himself to be?

This might be his guise, weaving an intricate character to stay alive within the enemies hold and gradually infiltrate and steal their intelligence. It was better to recruit such a cunning little fox onto his side.

-“Talk...about...” His tongue was stinging with each effort to talk;

- “What...?” Feng Ming yawned, his words coming out in a mumble his incoherent words sounded ridiculous as if he was a child reciting a language he had just learnt.

Should he try and get rid of his unwanted visitor?

Feng Ming's heart was in a conflict.

Being confined to the Prince's Hall was utterly a blow to the brain. Compared to endless boredom even this devil offered a refreshing change. However, this Cao Cao went overboard with provoking Feng Ming, he wasn't sure whether he would be able to handle what would come next.

Is it better to be bored to death? Or be irritated to beyond measure?

Whatever, considering I won't be able to run off any where with out him pouncing on me.

His only option was to take it as it comes.

Coincidentally, they both made up their minds, and in that instant their eyes met, both determined with their decision as each elicited a sneer.

Feng Ming was unsettled by the Cao Cao's enigmatic smile as if there was a message behind it that he could not decipher. This put him on alert.

Rong Tian was intrigued by the smile across the little assassin's face, interested to the reason behind it.

-“Feng Ming, where were you born?” He asked shifting their staring contest back to a conversation.

-“This ...”

Feng Ming didn't want to be misunderstood through his mumblings so instead he taped the floorboards under his feet.

-“You still refuse to concede that you are an assassin?” Rong Tian threatened.

-“I... In...fact... Ah...” He stuttered whilst trying to work his wind around the lump in his mouth.

-“The... Son”

It was chaos, impossible to comprehend what he was trying to say.

Rong Wang ended up observing Feng Ming as the younger man frantically attempted to use sign language waving his hands and arms to illustrate his words.

With a forced smile the Regent King returned his gestures:

-“Well, I understand, you say you are the Prince and not an impostor, correct?”

Feng Ming nodded enthusiastically.

-“You claim that you actually fell into the water, half drowned yourself and when you woke up your memories had disappeared, and instead you gave yourself a new name. Feng Ming, right?”

Feng Ming shook his head in agreement, before giving the Regent King a thumb up.

Rong Tian did not have a clue what sticking up one's thumb meant but he could feel Feng Ming was praising his translation progress.

-“I’m still not buying your story, it does not follow logic, these are simply all lies you have concocted. I’ve decided that you are a spy! In Xi Rei Kingdom spies are put to death by fire.”

Their easygoing conversation took a sudden change of pace as the look on Rong Wang’s face scorned.

WHAT?

In disbelief of the cyclic accusations against him Feng Ming's eyes, widened, and without a blink stared bewildered at the Regent King.

Rong Tian over looked the unpleasant look he was getting and laughed out loud.

-“Don’t be afraid, you only have to answer a few questions. You will only need to nod or shake your head to answer me, then I can determine whether you are or aren’t a spy.”

The eyes that glared at him, relaxed and blinked as if he agreed to another interrogation.

-“Can you fight with a sword?”

Feng Ming shook his head.

Rong Wang replied coldly:

- “The Prince has been trained in sword arts by the martial art masters in the Palace since childhood. If you are the Prince, how can you not fend with a sword?”

To his own defence Feng Ming murmured:

-“Mmh...I... Mm Can’t “

This was absurd. He was obviously trying to corner me until I give him what he wants to hear!

Once again he gave his silent lecture, waving his arms crazily explaining to the thick headed man his condition.

-“Oh, so every single part of your life before your fall you’ve completely lost all knowledge of?”

He didn’t sound impressed, but Feng Ming immediately gave affirmation by nodding.

-“Can you remember the person you loved the most?”

The question threw him off, what kind of question was this?

Feng Ming scratched his head, nodding his head slightly before changing it into a shake.

-“Is that a yes or a no?” The Regent King asked sternly.

Feng Ming hesitated, but his eyes lit up with an idea as he nodded to confirm his position on the question.

-“You can? Then who was the person you loved?” Rong Tian demanded impatiently.

-“Ah. ... King... Ahh...nnnhhh Father...” He purposely muttered.

Rong Tian stared at him for his response but suddenly laughed:

- “I give you credit for not being entirely stupid. You seem to know a trick or two. Of course every one knows that one could only endlessly love their own parents.”

He managed to pass this part of the trial, Feng Ming beamed triumphantly whilst making incoherent noises of his satisfaction.

-“However...” Rong Tian swerved back to the topic, his eyes flashed his cunningness.

-“What are the names of your father and mother?”

Feng Ming was blindsided, he inwardly cursed. He didn't even know the name of the Prince, where was he going to pull the names of the Prince's parents out from? Even the maids that served him in his quarters had not even used names when he had brought the topic up.

Rong Tian knew from the beginning there would be no answer to his question, but he had caught the rabbit. He just wanted to see his prey squirm under his malicious treatment. Watching Feng Ming's distress was rather enjoyable.

Interjecting before Feng Ming could mumble the Regent King replied in his stead:

-“I know, I understand that you fell into the river and you've washed up like a blank piece of paper, yes?”

Sparingly Feng Ming nodded.

The questions that followed were answered with a muddle expressions, it was a complete shamle. One would either think he was an elaborate story teller or a complete madman.

Rong Tian did not care much about the answers he received, but during his more civil second round of interrogation he could have an answer to his main concerns.

At the end, Rong Tian had two conclusions. Firstly, no matter how desperate Feng Ming's claim was

he was not the Prince and secondly, he could not be a spy sent by the country's enemies.

There was no sane spy that would infiltrate Xi Rei with no basic knowledge of the country.

So where did this strange young man come from?

The two continued long into the night, with one asking and one doing his best to answer.

Feng Ming was lively and lovable, his appearance was alluring. The more Rong Tian was with him the more he felt a strange connection. His heart couldn't help but lower the barriers to bask in the delight of their conversation.

With a chuckle, Rong Tian had another sly ploy up his sleeve.

-“Since you have lost your memories of Xi Rei, it is necessary that I, the Regent King, take the responsibility to restore the knowledge to you, my little Prince.”

He smirked smugly.

-“From today onwards, I will teach you everything that you've forgotten, from etiquette within the Royal Court to every other matter that is important.”

Teaching me? Etiquette and more??

The expression on Feng Ming's face was if, the Regent King had a huge ruler that smacked him across his head.

All Feng Ming saw in his mind were stars dancing around in a dizzy spell.

The handsome features on the Regent King's face frowned strictly, as if he was sternly talking to a child in front of him.

-“Disobedience will be punished, you should remember.” He intimidated.

It was true... He was in for it now.

Feng Ming's head bowed down in disbelief, his jaw wide open as he muttered and cursed his bad luck. This Prince wasn't going to get a break at all.

-“Tonight's lesson will be the first on etiquette. I will teach you how to bid someone good night.”

-“When you leave your subjects in the Royal Court, there will be important figure heads and officials. Whom you need to express to them your confidence and trust”

-“You will need to kiss them on the lips.”

You are kidding me! Are you trying to take advantage of me?!

Feng Ming's large eyes nearly popped, as they strained themselves staring scornfully at the Regent King's face.

Witnessing the little assassin's signature expression only issued a fit of laughter deep from Rong Tian's stomach.

In all seriousness, he spoke again and this time he wasn't toying with the younger man:

-“Court etiquette is in the most need of attention, and it is an important factor if you are the Prince. If you can't even tolerate learning, you will be easily spotted as an impostor, and treated as a spy.”

And spies are to be burnt until crispy.

Feng Ming finished off the sentence for the Regent King in his mind.

After all, the real intention of this gloating maniac was trying to use his power, to threaten a goodnight kiss from Feng Ming.

Should I surrender myself, just this once?

Before he could draw a conclusion, the shifty bastard already approached him, closing in their

proximity. The other's warm breath brushed across his cheeks, tickling him gently.

Rong Tian did not delay his assault, as his tongue flicked across Feng Ming's sensitive lips, gentling enticing him with his wet touch. Their kiss was missing the violence that their previous two encounters held.

Today Rong Tian was sincere and gentler than his usual self, he had taken into account the injury within the younger man's mouth.

Being engulfed by such a masculine beast that intoxicated him with his deadly kiss, Feng Ming began to feel light headed.

Compared with teaching Feng Ming etiquette, Rong Tian was probably more suited to teach him the art of kissing.

For the Regent King, their meeting had concluded in passionate kiss, although he had completely fought to restrain himself, he left with a strong taste of sweetness in his mouth.

Chapter Eight

Since their engaging conversation, Rong Wang became a regular visitor to the Prince's quarters. In comparison to humiliating and torturing the worthless Prince through the darkness of the night, Rong Tian had found a new joy just watching the peculiar Feng Ming during the light of day. The new Prince proved to be more interesting with each moment.

The lessons given on Court proceedings and etiquette were genuinely a messy affair. Rong Wang's teachings were entwined with actions a ruler should not mix in with serious business.

These were the countless kisses the Regent King had selfishly implemented on Feng Ming as an ongoing requirement.

-“A kiss when we meet, before I leave, before you speak, before a meal if we are sharing a table and before you sleep...”

Feng Ming brows narrowed in irritation and he counted the orders with his fingers.

His tongue had gradually healed over the days where he could articulate himself again in every aspect even occasionally answering back to the Regent King.

However, he was aware of these endless kisses that were demanded from him was just utter nonsense.

For the sake of not driving Rong Wang into another fit of rage he complied and to avoid another episode of “shedding of blood” it was the best idea to let Rong Tian take his underhanded advantages over him.

Considering they were both male, it was hard to tell which party was more disadvantaged.

Rong Wang was certainly not satisfied with just simple kisses, but the thought of Feng Ming’s defiance and unyielding glares and the fact the boy would rather sacrifice his life left the Regent King feeling scrupulous.

Both had their minds set in their individual actions for now which allowed them to be compatible for moment being.

-“How am I going to manage these kisses, I fear my mouth is still quite swollen, alas...”

Feng Ming’s large eyes darted firmly onto Rong Wang hoping he buy in an excuse. His death glare was closely followed with a sigh, pretending as if he was the one at a lost for their intimacy.

Rong Tian was at the desk writing, upon hearing Feng Ming's exaggerated sigh he placed down his writing brush* and offered:

-“Don't put up this act, you've already stalled for days, you have to write.”

Regardless with Feng Ming's wishes, Rong Tian was determined to have him continue the original Prince's lifestyle and this was inclusive of mimicking the Prince's writing.

Feng Ming was unwilling to take up the brush.

Rong Wang extended the brush he had briefly dipped in ink, in front of Feng Ming.

The Prince eyed the brush in front of him with oddly and spun his face towards the Regent King.

-“Let's do this instead, how about I tell you another funny story, it's called Ali Baba and...” He tried before he was cut short.

Desiring no storytelling, Rong Wang forcibly placed the brush into the slender hands and issued him a warning with his deadly eyes.

Feng Ming looked at the brush in his hand and tried his one sided bargaining once more:

-“How about this, you write and demonstrate for me and for each word I'll give you a kiss in return.”

Feng Ming dug as low as to play the card of sacrificing his sex appeal.

The Prince's wager had no appeal to Rong Tian who could easily obtain the Prince's lips with other means the bargaining chip only made the Regent King's expression darken by a few folds.

Feng Ming wide eyes fixated on the older man for a response, he finally gritted his teeth and surrendered.

-“Alright! I’ll write!” He declared with much frustration before issuing Rong Tian a warning, clearly stating the following words:

-“You aren’t allowed to be ashamed once you look!”

Walking with a renewed air of dignity he moved confidently towards the study desk and with his wet brush in hand he drew several strokes. They started off fast, neat and coherent and by the time he finished he gave a large heave to show his completion and unceremoniously dropped the brush off to the side.

Hinting to Rong Wang to come and admire his work.

The Regent King found the sudden surge of might in the boy rather surprising, so he immediately made his way for the inspection.

After absorbing what had been written, the sight completely reeled Rong Wang back a step in astonishment.

-“How is it? Aren’t you ashamed of my skill?” Pressed Feng Ming who was pleased with himself considering he had warned the King.

-“For what reason should I be?” Rong Tian asked.

-“As the Regent King, aren’t you ashamed that the Crowned Prince’s ugly writing? A dog could even do better!” He exclaimed a little confused to the man’s reaction.

This irritated Feng Ming and he let at an animalistic outburst, after the release he calmed down.

He stopped and said coldly:

- “Considering I’ve lost my memories, I’ve got no need to pen anything down. That’s right! From now on don’t force me to write anything I can only use a ballpoint pen!”

He let slip his frustrations before he roughly settled himself into a chair and helped himself to a cup of black tea.

Rong Wang finally took action, moving forwards to the sitting Feng Ming and brashly hauled him up by his collar.

-“You reckless brat, you dare to tease me?” He spat gingerly into the Prince’s ears.

-“Let go! I can’t breathe!” Proclaimed the younger man as he struggled in the vice hold.

-“I’ll *teach* you.” The Regent King chided his voice showing no mercy.

-“You ... Mhmm ...” All protest was smothered.

His body was quickly ensnared within the older man’s limbs. Soon his tongue was entangled with the Regent King’s and engaged in an intense fight within his mouth. The battle was wild and intense but both side gradually seeped into a more sweet connection, as the viciousness dissipated into luscious sucking of lust filled lips.

When their lips parted, they left each other panting and short of breath their chests heaved in unison.

Feng Ming whipped his face away from the Regent King’s. His cheeks blushed a deep crimson.

Bastard, if this continues on, even a handsome young man like me would turn gay.

And if I turn gay I’d most likely be allocated on the receiving end! That’s not worth it!

Looking at how things are turning out, if I take the first strike to set who is the thrower, I should be the one to top Rong Wang.

That thought lead to a smile that crept along Feng Ming's lips.

At the same time, Rong Tian noticed Feng Ming's flushed face. He had him where he wanted him. His blushing deep red. He laughed inwardly.

This little brat will soon be obediently pinned under my body begging for pleasure...

Images of a ravaged and tamed Feng Ming flickered into the Regent King's thoughts. He couldn't help a smile that stretched across his own lips.

As the two sets of eyes finally made contact, they had both noticed the weird smile that was planted on each others mouths and each person had their own interpretation.

Feng Ming's smile is growing sweeter day by day. Perhaps he has gradually grown to love me?

That was wishful thinking on the Regent King's behalf.

His opponent was on alert.

Rong Tian, this bastard is smiling evilly again. I have to be careful and not let him top me.

The days that followed their silent confrontation could not be considered bad at all. The fighters at both ends continued to look forward to their sweet victory over each other.

Rong Tian had backed off from trying to force Feng Ming into the tedious task of Chinese calligraphy and Feng Ming didn't have a chance to carry out his plan to assert himself onto a "top" position over the Regent King.

-“Your Royal Highness, this is a platter of fruit that has been freshly delivered by the order of Rong Wang.”

The beautiful pet being raised within the Palace, should be treated like this right? Boring, Boring and Boring!!!

The same senseless routine was getting old Feng Ming was going to drive his head against a wall sometime soon.

-“Chiu Lan, I want to go outside for a stroll.” Feng Ming stated a matter-of-factly.

Chiu Lan whisked her head quickly towards the Palace guards sent to guard the Prince's doors.

-“But by the orders of Rong Wang, the Prince is not permitted to leave his quarters.”

It almost sounded like a silent plea.

-“Humph!”

Feng Ming glared at Chiu Lan momentarily, knowing he couldn't entirely shift the blame of his prison on her.

He wasn't aware that this signature glares at his maid servant only effect was to lead her blushing and sent her heart racing. It was a completely empty threatening tool towards her.

-“Argh! I am so bored my brain is going to melt!”

Feng Ming suddenly unleashed another round of screaming, creating a stir as his attendants jumped in reaction to their surprised. Even the guards that stood at the doors were alerted by the scream, drawing their swords out and looked around nervously.

-“What are you raging about? The whole Palace can hear you outside” Reproved a timely Regent King, who had entered from behind.

Feng Ming immediately turned and with a slender finger accusingly pointed at Rong Wang's nose:

-“I'm warning you, if you keep boring the living daylight out of me, I will die! Certainly croak it right

here! So if you want another kissing partner to your beck and call go and employ someone else understood?"

To the Prince's rather comical threats, Rong Wang could only lightly chuckle, the strict muscles of the contours of his expression immediately relaxed.

-“So you are bored to the point of breaking down, then how about I take you out for a horse ride, sounds good right?”

-“Horse?”

Feng Ming's eyes light up, but then a suspicious light lit up within.

-“On what conditions?” He demanded, knowing that there was never an easy deal with Rong Tian.

-“What can you exchange for it?” countered the Regent King.

-“Well, I can tell you a story, about the Mermaid Princess” Feng Ming started.

Feng Ming's story was cut off abruptly, forever untold as the voice remained trapped in his throat when the Regent King's mouth knocked him with a kiss.

-“Did you know? Every time you kiss, you like to keep your eyes open, to look at my face at close range.”

Rong Wang absorbed the sweetness before him, during their break to regain their breathe he took the liberty to answer Feng Ming’s question in a low voice.

-“That’s in order to be able to watch whether your lust has reached your brain and set it alit in a fever, yet to have you try and resist and fight against it.”

Feng Ming’s eyes were at their usual wide capacity as he stared stupefied at the response.

-“That’s settled then, I’ll take you for a ride.”

Rong Tian released the younger man from his hold to allow him to catch his breath.

-“Provided that... The Prince will allow his humble servant, to personally assist you in changing into your riding garments.”

Rong Wang was mocking him with his tone and at the same time the voice was employing a rich magnetism hinting at something more scandalous.

-“You pervert!” Feng Ming cried abashed, before submitting to the ridiculous condition. Anything was better than melted brain on the floor.

He whispered:

- “All right, the deal is settled.”

In the inner chamber, the Regent King ordered all the servants to step down leaving the pair alone in the quarters which allowed him to strip the offending items of clothing off Feng Ming as he pleased.

The slim and slender body was exposed in front of him. Rong Tian would have never fathom the day he would be captivated by the mere sight of this perfect body, which was sending his stomach into knots and his mouth dry.

-“Hey, don’t just gawk at me!”

Feng Ming scared frightened by the ominous look he was receiving from the larger man. His heart beats began to hammer quicker from the fear that Rong Tian might try to attack him. Based on strength, Feng Ming was on a clear disadvantage.

Rong Wang’s complexion developed a strange glow for a long while, and he was sure taking his sweet changing the riding garments for Feng Ming.

-“Don’t you dare molest me!” shrieked the Prince.

-“Feng Ming your skin is nice and smooth as silk.”

-“Of course!”

-“However, don’t you grope me!” He warned the wandering hands.

His Royal Highness and the Regent King spent a good hour in the inner chamber just to change.

By the time the Crowned Prince appeared, his face was painted scarlet with matching beaming red ears.

An updated newsflash of the Prince's development quickly travelled throughout the Palace.

Chapter Nine

The scene that Feng Ming had first imagined was both men mounted on their horses, the animals in a wild bolt across an open plain. The reality presented him with a lawn cordoned off by a wooden fence. They didn't even leave the confines of the Imperial Palace.

The pitiful sight before him compared with his vivid imagination completely deflated his mood, sinking into a slump of anti-climax.

Subsequently, the animal that was lead out towards him was not even close to a horse, one could easily classify the sorry looking animals a dumpy mule.

The romantic and wild horseback ride turned into a complete flop. No one could blame the resentful eyes that fixated on Rong Tian.

Rong Wang paid no attention to the death ray aimed his way and instead explained why Feng Ming's fantasy was brought to a halt:

-“I believe you have also forgotten your horsemanship skills you have learnt from childhood. It is best you start with a smaller horse and work yourself up before attempting to ride a full size one outside of the Imperial Palace, safety comes first.”

Feng Ming bitterly mumbled.

-“You tricked me.” He accused.

The attendants at ears length covered their mouths smothering their giggles at the couples bickering.

In order to preserve the last remnants of his dignity, Feng Ming was refusing to mount the “horse” – mule. This was only going to happen over his dead body.

Rong Wang surrendered sighing at the stubborn boy he resorted to his last option and called out to his stable masters.

-“Someone, prepare White Cloud and lead him out.” He ordered the servants.

Soon, a dignified high pitch of a horse's neigh could be heard. An attendant emerged and lead along a snow white horse towards its waiting Master.

The animal's smooth white coat gleamed with a healthy sheen. It was as if appeared from some mythical story, it emitted a majestic atmosphere. One could immediately tell that this horse's background was certainly from a prestigious line of esteemed pedigree.

Feng Ming's eyes quickly flickered with excitement.

Rong Wang laughed at the obvious change in Feng Ming's mood. The Regent King swung his legs effortlessly over his horse and mounted it as if it was second nature, then he promptly pulled Feng Ming up to join him.

-“This here is my beloved horse, called White Cloud”

The Regent King gave his prized pet a tap with his heels on its belly and the well trained horse screamed in response and took flight into a gallop. The animal's powerful legs carried his passengers at a speed of wind.

This was Feng Ming's first experience on a horse, and the adrenaline rush surging through him was more exciting than any crazy roller coaster ride.

With little effort White Cloud had made three laps around the restrictive trotting area at god speed. Rong Wang reined in the bridle and the great animal obediently came to a halt.

-“Continue! Hey! Come on!” Cried the Prince still elated with joy.

-“I have to attend to official matters in Court, and I can’t stay here with you.” The Regent King replied, regardless this didn’t dampen the younger man’s spirit.

-“That’s even better, you can leave and I can ride White Cloud by myself!”

-“I won’t permit you.” Rong Wang ordered bluntly as he cast rain over Feng Ming’s parade.

Rong Tian dismounted and reached for the other. There was a short struggle to tear the unrelenting Feng Ming off his perch. The boy was still tightly holding onto White Clouds reins when the Regent King finally managed to yank him down.

-“White Cloud won’t accept other people than me. He will buck and you will get hurt. You can ride that one over there.”

His finger pointed off to the side at an innocent pony nibbling away at a patch of grass. Feng Ming stared at the pony bitterly and straight up refused the degrading animal.

-“That’s out of the question! I can ride a horse and I want to ride White Cloud.” He whined stubborn as a fat kid in a candy store.

As the result of their quarrel, Feng Ming revoked his only chance to even ride a pony.

Rong Wang was afraid leaving the boy by himself because he knew this would only end in trouble so he simply dragged the younger man kicking and screaming along to attend to Xi Rei's business.

When the pair entered the official Court Hall, it was already occupied with numerous important figureheads.

Silence besieged the room.

Imperial Noblemen, Generals and high ranking Officers were stunned, their jaws jarred and eyes peel wide open to the bewildering sight before them.

Their attention had fixated onto Feng Ming. The Crowned Prince who was tucked away deep in the secret maze of the Palace was brought alongside the Regent King to attend a meeting for official business.

Were their eyes playing tricks on them?

It appears the strange rumours flying around the Palace had more credit than any of them liked to believe, especially when the evidence was clear as day.

Rong Wang and His Majesty's relationship appeared to have taken a new direction.

Within moments of their silent shock the officials scrambled to collect themselves and offered their Crowned Prince the correct respectful salutations.

-“Your Highness”

-“Your Majesty.” They murmured one after another.

Feng Ming watched his subjects, who clearly held the Prince with no esteem. Apart from the formalities, the slightest hint of respect could not be sniffed out between their greetings.

This only paid to further highlight how each individual saw him, they were probably taunting how weak and incompetent he was. Inwardly, the Prince couldn’t help but feel the man beside him was somewhat responsible.

The Prince’s large solemn eyes turned to Rong Wang.

Instead of boiling over he decided not to be swamped by the attitude he was receiving from the Court officials. He chose to turn the situation into a jest, for his own entertainment, given he had for the first time a golden opportunity to tease Rong Tian.

With a feigned blank expression he provoked the Regent King:

-“Rong Wang, how am to address them? Do I apply *that* type of etiquette?”

Rong Tian's eyes flared dangerously as they beamed down onto the younger man. In a low voice he replied aggressively:

-“That type of etiquette is reserved only for the Regent King of Xi Rei.”

For better insurance to make sure Feng Ming was clear on the matter, he further warned:

-“You are not allowed to kiss any of the Court officials, do you understand?”

The officials sat in their assigned seats, and the Regent King arranged for Feng Ming to be seated with him in the middle of the room upon a platform. This position was given to him out of the proper respect of his Imperial identity.

In the centre of the Hall was a mural map made entirely out of clay. It showed various countries with their terrains. Countless miniature flags littered the map, making it look more like a pin cushion. Lines that curved over the surface of the map also helped defined the regions.

Xi Rei's great Kingdom occupied a vast area of land riddled with numerous mountain ranges. Feng Ming studied the map closely, and recalled the information Rong Wang had given him.

Apparently within this era, there were eleven countries continuously locking arms in battle. Wars often broke out between the Kingdoms and it was chaos.

This type of situation was even messier than the period of Seven Warring States in ancient China which Feng Ming had known of from history class in his own world.

-“Disputes have increased at the borders we share with the Tong Country. The number of thieves has escalated and our civilians have been pillaged. We have received reports of property damage and looting.” A heavy-set old and white haired General grunted.

-“From my point of view, this is basically the country of Tong’s doing. They are deliberately provoking us to start conflict. Why else would those petty criminals flee across the border when our troops were deployed to catch them?”

Rong Wang steadily replied:

-“Don’t be so impatient, General Chu. We are all well aware that the Tong’s King is a schemer and our countries are not on good terms. At this moment our priority lies in dealing with a pressing matter, what are our strategies on how we shall deal with the envoy arriving from the Country of Li.”

Just hearing the complexity in the troubles of the Court was enough to give Feng Ming a headache so he

tugged lightly at the Regent King's sleeve to get his attention.

-“What kind of place are the Country of Li and the Tong Kingdom?” He asked in a whisper.

The Court was modest in size hence it was no hard task for the audience's attentive ears to catch hold of the Prince's question.

Although the Prince's incompetence was notorious, none of the subjects would have fathomed that he could wasn't even educated in the countries around Xi Rei and their circumstances.

Countless pairs of contempt filled eyes immediately bombarded Feng Ming's blank face.

Rong Wang ignored the insolence, stood up and walked towards the map, his hand gesturing at a large region North of Xi Rei.

-“The Country of Li is located here.”

In a gentle tone he continued a short lecture:

-“An official messenger sent by Xi Rei was assassinated within the borders of Li. As a result, Xi Rei is now in a position of initiating a war.”

Another snort interrupted the Court proceedings:

-“Humph!”

A middle aged military officer reached for the double-edged sword tucked into a belt on his waist, his fury unleashed in a rain of spiteful words.

-“The Country of Li is inciting war! So be it! I, Tong Jian Ming will be the first not to show any mercy with my sword to that damn King of Li!” He roared.

Catching the “Tong” as the man’s surname, Feng Ming was absolutely positive that the crazy middle aged man was related to the Master Tong Yi he had been graced with.

Feng Ming had managed to give Master Tong a good fight, remembering how his visitor had left looking like a sorry scoundrel. He had eagerly waited for any reprisal to come his way but he was unaware that RongWang had specifically cautioned Tong Yi to stay clear of the Prince.

Rong Wang pondered for a short while and shook his head distastefully:

-“The King of Li ascended the throne at a young age and he has high ambitions, craving to ultimately rule all the Kingdoms. He is a problem that we have to abolish, pull out the root before it grows. However the Country of Tong is not sitting idly. They are a tiger waiting patiently for an advantage to take its prey.”

He paused.

-“If we act too rashly and send our troops into war with Li, this will only provide an opening to any attacks by Tong. They will anticipate our lowered defences.”

Feng Ming blurted without thinking:

-“Was the messenger an important high ranked officer? So you mean that Xi Rei is on the brink of starting a war for this reason?”

-“Aiyah!” He heaved in disbelief.

-“To be honest, what is so good about starting a war? Instead of belligerence wouldn't it be better if everyone could live happily in harmony? Considering the population of the Earth is considerably small...”

Feng Ming's unprecedented interruption ended in a chain of questions pointing at several problems. When he began speaking, he passed judgment on the collective decisions by the Court attendees. Everyone resented the unwanted input as it only became a hindrance, but they were all in no position to disregard what was said due to Feng Ming's identity as the Crowned Prince.

The men stood silently and vented their displeasure inside.

The Regent King defended their actions, answering Feng Ming's last question:

-“Whether we are attacked at our border or have our messenger assassinated, how we react to these problems is an important matter.”

-“If Xi Rei sits with our hands folded and unprepared from attacks, our Country’s prestige will be quickly buried. Not only will there be civil unrest but we will also lose skilled and talented people who would flee and ally themselves to other countries.”

Feng Ming nodded finding it rather interesting that even in this era skills and talent was highly appreciated.

Moreover, the situation in this world was similar to that of the Warring states period. People were able to save their necks by changing alliances.

The argument escalated as mouths shot opinions cross firing into the air.

-“Rong Wang, the situation at the frontier with Tong is more important. We should declare war with them first and show them Xi Rei’s power!” An official exclaimed.

-“The situation we have at the border only pertains to a minor group of civilians who are being harassed. The secretary that I sent as Xi Rei’s messenger was assassinated! At this moment we must declare war with the Country of Li and seek justice!”

-“Since this is the case, it would be better to simultaneously declare war on both countries!”

-“General Tong, instigating war between two countries is senseless. It will only serve to quicken the deterioration of Xi Rei’s fighting powers.”

The heated debated continued for a large half of the day and there was still no resolution from their meeting.

All they had to deliberate on was to determine which matter was more critical, the border feud with Tong or the assassination of their own in Li.

Feng Ming listened aloof to their ongoing chattering, the more he heard the more impatient he grew. He thought to himself how ancient Generals were like a bunch of old fussy women.

The Prince cleared his throat in a soft audible manner.

-“Can I go out for a stroll?” He asked quietly but the background of the officials cloaked his request.

Feng Ming dared not to be more audible. Regardless of his authority, no one paid him any notice. Even Rong Tian was no exception. The Regent King was fully engaged with the political dilemma.

Feng Ming had his backside planted on his perch for ages, even his spine was yearning to be stretched. Seeing no one was paying him any attention, he simply stood up and covertly headed towards the exit.

This movement caught Rong Tian's eyes, who then made no hesitation to stop the Prince from leaving, hauling the younger man back into position.

-“Where does His Royal Highness think he is going?” He whispered with a hint of annoyance.

-“We are in the middle of an important discussion, be a good boy and sit here quietly don't give me any trouble.”

With this Feng Ming was chained in, forced to watch on the conversation that didn't invite him to participate.

However, this session allowed him to observe Rong Wang and get a sense of the burden the Regent King had to carry on his shoulders. The Country of Xi Rei's problems were carried by Rong Tian with such an air of dignity.

His admiration only lasted for a fleeting moment, when the thoughts of the contrast between himself and the Regent King arouse again.

One could not avoid the fact that, this Prince's achievements has only amounted to becoming a famous useless nobody. Even his own subjects continued to under mind him, offering insincere respect through gritted teeth.

Their charade of feigned reverence began to kindle a fire in the bottom of Feng Ming's heart.

Thinking back to the morning, where he was offered a mule inside of horse added more fuel to that fire.

His chain of thoughts finally accrued into an explosion. His face was red with fury as he casted an outburst of his frustration towards his subjects.

-“What do I have anything to do with this discussion?” He screamed and blurted without thinking.

-“I’m merely a puppet and nothing more! So what if you guys all understand and comprehend everything where as I am the useless one!”

Taking no break from his rant he continued:

-“You pack of military buffs have spent an entire day arguing noisily over such trivial matters. What kind of job efficiency are you working at? If I was your employer, I’d make you all redundant! Out of sight and out of mind!”

-“Just trivial matters?” The aged General Chu looked gob smacked.

-“Does His Royal Highness treat war between two countries as a minor issue?”

-“Yes!” Proclaimed Feng Ming who was ready for any rebutting required.

His eyes pinned resolutely on the old man before speaking directly:

-“If you want to rage a war then so be it, why are you all wasting time on arguing over whether the border attacks is more significant than an official killed! Haven’t you guys set up any foreign allegiances as part of your tactics?”

Feng Ming groaned when no one responded.

-“Come on! Undoubtedly to succeed in a war defeating close enemies by making foreign alliances is a vital step! Even the Warring State period was more advanced than you guys! What a bunch stupid idiots!”

The Court hall went completely silent during his venting.

Everyone had their eyes glued on His Royal Highness who had just given a taste of his temper, as if he whipped each official across the face. There was still no reaction to his outburst as they all stood astounded.

That was until Rong Tian ruthlessly dragged Feng Ming from his spot by the collar, his uncontrolled strength lifted the poor boy into midair.

Rong Wang’s handsome face was chilled as ice, as it leaned closer to the Prince’s, his voice dangerously asked.

-“What did you just say?” He demanded.

Feng Ming had a good streak of days, escaping the full blunt of Rong Tian's wrath, now he was blanked upon having the fury released on him once more.

-“I s-said... I said...” His tongue tied, a knot developed deep in his throat.

Feng Ming cursed himself inwardly for being a meddlesome fool.

He swallowed before pressing his luck:

-“I said you were all stupid idiots?”

-“Before that!”

-“Before that? I said, even the Warring State period was more advanced than you guys! What a bunch stupid idiots?”

This was incorrect as well.

-“No!”

Rong Wang eyebrows jerked up in annoyance and he growled:

-“Before that!”

Feng Ming finally came to grip to what the Regent King wanted to know.

-“Oh! Are you asking about foreign alliances to defeat enemies closer to home?”

-“God, I wouldn’t have guessed it.” He said relieved as he tapped his head lightly with his hand.

His body relaxed under the unfriendly hold even daring to wave his limbs freely.

-“I understand now, each country is actually enwrapped with their own disputes and no one has actually set up any official alliances. There’s no tactical system in place between any of the countries. That’s right, this means you guys must be in an era before the Warring States!”

Feng Ming laughed at his discovery:

-“For some reason I thought this was the Tang Dynasty, considering the architectural system in Xi Rei is advance. It is quite an achievement probably even be a rival the modern times.”

This was the first time Rong Tian didn’t cut off Feng Ming madman rants, so the young man bathed in his triumph.

The Regent King permitted the Prince to continue his insanity, however instead of anger he was growing elated in his own heart.

-“Well, Your Highness, if I could ask you to thoroughly explain to us what you mean by making foreign alliances to defeat enemies closer to home.” Rong Tian prompted.

-“What?”

-“Me?”

Feng Ming’s finger darted towards his own nose, confused with the sudden attention.

It was impossible that these people could be easily swayed by their thirst for knowledge, to the point they were even showing him respect?

Weren't they all looking at me with contempt just moments before?

He whisked his head towards the pack of Generals. It was like if someone had injected them with a dose of miracle drug. All the faces that were looking at the Prince had changed and now they were brimming with ecstasy.

Who would have thought, that in this space-time, diplomacy and war tactics was still highly prized by scholars and the military?

Every country was aware that to have complete power over the land under the heavens, one must possess advance knowledge on combative martial arts which would contribute to an army’s strength. Needless to say, mastering theories and tactics also played a major role in domination. If one was not knowledgeable on war tactics, it would be difficult to start any game plans for war.

It was just Feng Ming's luck that Xi Rei Kingdom was still under developed in this aspect and he wasn't going to just easily hand over a thousand years essence of knowledge.

Making foreign alliances to defeat close enemies wouldn't have been anything interesting to a commoner's ear. However, to the ears of group of powerful men immersed in military and politics, his words were like a crack of thunder awakening their desires.

-“Your Highness, Prince!” General Chu broke away as a representative from the eagerly awaiting subjects.

He was even addressing Feng Ming with respect!

-“Your Highness, concerning “Defeating close enemies and making foreign alliances” are you trying to say that we should ignore minor disputes and focus on capturing our closest enemies to expand our own Kingdom? Then follow through with reinforcing our numbers by utilizing soldiers from the fallen enemies, to gather more strength to challenge another country? If your plan is like this, then we should soon be ruling across all the lands! Please your Highness, would you enlighten us with more details?”

Where Feng Ming had just barely said a few words, this old fox somehow inferred so much nonsense from thin air. Being misunderstood made the Prince shriek with frustration.

-“Do not talk nonsense! Taking over the eleven Kingdoms is the objective of other countries. It is not what our own should do! I wasn’t conspiring with you to dominate the world.”

He couldn’t help but feel the need to shield himself with Rong Wang.

Rong Tian chuckled as Feng Ming shrank behind him. A smile etched across his lips as he leaned over to whisper into the Prince’s ear:

-“Just say what you want to say and tomorrow I’ll take you riding on White Cloud for a whole day.”

-“Really?”

Just hearing the beautiful horse’s name and the offer invigorated him. Feng Ming emerged from his hiding place behind Rong Tian with a renewed confidence he indulged in the positive attention.

-“He he... In fact the reason why I have rarely left the Prince’s quarters is because I’ve been investing a lot of time in researching and planning out great theories, Alright, I’m going to share my findings and experiences with you...”

That evening fresh gossip sprinkled around the Imperial Palace. His Royal Highness had gained the doting love of Rong Wang, whom permitted the Prince to join him in an official Court procession and even allowed him to sit by his side.

Moreover, regardless of whether they were veterans or young, all the Court officials that left the Grand Hall, had strangely developed a positive new opinion of their beautiful and apparently now “talented” Crowned Prince.

When the odd couple returned to the Prince’s quarters, Feng Ming lashed out his anger at the Regent King:

-“Why did you command the Generals and the other attendees not to spread word of my abilities? Are you jealous of me?”

Rong Wang shook his head:

- “You are the Crowned Prince. Your life is constantly in danger. If the other countries find out that the Prince is actually quite competent, there’s bound to be countless assassins out for your blood. It is wiser to keep you concealed under the guise of incompetence.”

-“Ha Ha, as long as you are aware that I am quite capable.”

Feng Ming already had a smug grin by the time Rong Tian was half way through his praise.

The smile that beamed at him only made Rong Tian want to smoothen his lips over the boy's mouth.

-“I know that you are holding back, there's more isn't there?”

-“Of course, I have more information stored inside my mind. Do you want to hear what I have?”

Rong Wang's seductive lips pulled back into a sneer:

-“Is there conditions for this exchange?”

Yes! You have to let me top you once...

However such a request was too embarrassing and inappropriate.

Feng Ming rolled his eyes, and laughed dryly:

-“I need something to keep by my side for self defence. Even if it is some weird kind of weapon, or even a pair of rusty handcuffs would suffice.”

-“For what reason?”

Rong Wang's eyes narrowed as he studied the Prince.

-“Didn't you say that I'd be endangered, that there are people who want to murder me? I need to protect myself.”

Given the fact Feng Ming had a poor track record of defending himself with Rong Tian, even given a weapon he most likely wouldn't be able to hold up much of a fight.

The sudden request made the Regent King apprehensive.

-“Using a weapon?”

Shit! He is suspicious.

Feng Ming lamented, knowing he could change the mood with one method. He self volunteered and delivered his deep red lips to the man in front of him, aiming to divert the Regent King's thought patterns.

This is ridiculous. Feng Ming was growing more accustomed to their shared kisses. What was he going to do?

Moreover, each time they connected he could not help but wish that the Regent King would venture deeper into his mouth with passion.

Feng Ming muttered under his breath.

I've been corrupted...

Chapter Ten

Rong Tian kept his promise and sure enough took Feng Ming out horse riding the next day.

When Feng Ming spotted White Cloud, he became ecstatic and was practically dancing with joy.

After a few laps of shared riding with Rong Wang, the Prince was beginning to get more familiar with his newly learnt skill so Feng Ming demanded to ride White Cloud alone.

-“Impossible, you haven’t grasped the basic skills of horsemanship, how could you ride White Cloud by yourself?”

-“Huh?”

With much scorn, Feng Ming glared accusingly at the Regent King:

-“Last night, who said I was capable and gallant, I am able to do anything and simply a genius?”

Replying coyly Rong Wang offered the truth:

-“It was to make you happy. As the Crowned Prince, how can you take others flattery seriously?”

-“You tricked me again!” Feng Ming hurled back in a fit of anger, before twisting his body to face away from the man, bitter with his indignation.

Two bodies were both situated on the horse’s back thus due to the close proximity of their shared seating their bodies couldn’t help but meet very tight and intimately. Feng Ming’s sudden squirming unknowingly brushed against the Regent King, he immediately triggered a response of arousal from Rong Tian.

Within moments, something had awakened beneath him, an extremely harden length infiltrated the compact space between the two men, scaring Feng Ming to the point the blood drained from his face. He didn’t dare to move a fraction, choosing to stay cemented.

-“I warned you not to thrash about.”

Rong Wang’s chest was heaving slightly as he was trying to maintain himself. However, the language in his eyes was saying otherwise, as they were burning with a fervent flame when they bore into Feng Ming.

The attendants that were in the near distance didn’t seem to be aware what was happening.

Feng Ming could feel the scorching heat radiating from Rong Wang’s member. The bulging evidence did not shy away from the lust that was pulsing through its owner’s heart.

Feng Ming could only bring up images of newspapers that reported violent rape cases. With those thoughts he couldn't help a sickly numbness that started to spread from his head downwards.

He asked in a soft voice:

- "I'll be obedient and get off the horse, when you've settled down a bit you can dismount, all right?"

The Regent King's crotch was pitched up high and noticeable, if he dismounted parading himself, he would completely lose his precious idol status and his credibility with his people.

- "That won't be necessary." Rong Wang replied with a tough tone which offered no bargaining between the two.

This only acted to send Feng Ming into a panic.

- "Well, what do you want? You were the one that got aroused by yourself." Feng Ming stared in frustration, wanting nothing further with the Regent King.

- "I warn you, I am now an appreciated and capable Crowned Prince and you aren't allowed to touch a hair on my head."

The bargaining chip he collected from yesterday's events was immediately brought out and thrown onto the table.

However, Feng Ming was oblivious to the fact that his beautiful angry eyes completely failed to help him threaten the Regent King. Instead, they were alluring to Rong Tian, as they provided a mysterious gravitational pull which almost caused him to grab Feng Ming and pin him down beneath his own body on top of the grass.

Even though it wasn't entirely impossible to execute his possessive needs over the Prince, Rong Tian wasn't going to make it awkward for his own men.

-“What are you doing?” Feng Ming said quickly in concern.

-“Letting you assist me in putting out my fire.”

The two men's voices were lowered as much as possible, escaping any audiences.

Suddenly, Feng Ming's hand was unwillingly tugged over and placed on top of the strong erection that was hidden beneath the Regent King's robes.

It was a complete weapon of destruction!

He immediately understood the Regent King's intentions, and his face seared with bright red and he scolded him angrily:

-“You pervert!”

-“Are you going to assist me or not?” Rong Wang asked impatiently, his tone was basically refusing to accept “No” for an answer.

The heat radiating from the organ under Feng Ming’s palm was astounding there was also a strong throbbing which surged through the man’s hardened length. Feeling the other’s rush of blood only sent Feng Ming’s heart pounding, and it began to thump hard against his chest.

White Cloud remained at calm in comparison to his two guests who were rather restless on his back. The horse was gracefully pacing the grass paddock. His movements were slow and sturdy, and somewhat rhythmic as he caused his riders to rock gently with each step. This motion added friction between the Regent King and the Crowned Prince.

As a result, within seconds this gyration caused Feng Ming to reach the same excited situation the Regent King was in, he was aroused too.

He cursed himself inwardly. Gritting his teeth and sucking in the last of his sanity he spoke in a pained voice:

-“There’s a condition, I’ll help you but you’ll have to help me in return.”

Rong Wang was taken by surprise by this attractive condition, his mouth went dry and his crotched ached with pain from the new promise of attention.

In a hoarse seductive tone the Regent King managed:

- "Hurry up, why are you dawdling?"

Sparing no time, he practiced what he preached and immediately snaked his hand into Feng Ming's clothes.

On the tall steed, two men began to slowly coax and caress each other. Maintaining the intensity and yet having to be cautious of attracting their servant's attention, heightened both their stimulations.

- "I still think that you are inexperienced in this aspect." The Regent King teased with a cunning smile.

Rong Wang large hands continued to firmly rub Feng Ming's hard modest member.

However, the Regent King's own rapid breathing didn't hide his own excitement. Under Feng Ming's gentle caresses an orgasm was welling from the pit of his stomach and it was practically on the verge of exploding.

On the other hand, Feng Ming was completely useless, his senses were thrown out the door and his brain was basically embedded in a frenzy of pleasure.

The Prince was speechless, his mouth couldn't even function and his neck was blushed with pink. The poor boy could only bite down his jaw to stop his whimpering to escape from his lips.

Surges of electric currents originating from their fingertips were firing neurons to their brains, stirring up the primal desires deep within, pleasing their lusts and their obvious pleasure surfaced.

Feng Ming began to whimper under the Regent King's unbearable touch:

-“Mmmph...”

At the final moment before Feng Ming's release, Rong Tian abruptly kissed the trembling lips, sealing the sound of gratification within. The kiss helped Feng Ming escape attention from any of their attendants. If it had not been the case it would have been an extremely embarrassing groan.

Warm white milky fluid squirted into each of their palms.

-“Lucky White Cloud's coat is white.” Rong Tian commented with a smirk.

Rong Wang began to clean himself up, rubbing with the hems of an inner layer of his plentiful clothing and he slowly caught his breath.

Feng Ming gradually came to his senses and he too, reached into his front to start cleaning the spent friend he had in his trousers.

-“Wait a moment!”

Rong Wang halted him from continuing, and from the breast of his robe he fished out a handkerchief which was covered with delicate embroidery.

With this, he reached into Feng Ming's robes and dutifully wiped the traces of their passion from his spent member and his thighs.

Feng Ming's face turned red and abashed but he still managed a "Thank you."

-“You're welcome.”

Rong Tian took the stained handkerchief with the embarrassing evidence from Feng Ming and lifted it up slightly to admire it.

-“I'll keep this as a memento.” He declared seriously.

Giving no opportunity to the Prince to snatch it back, Rong Tian treasured bounty was quickly returned to a hidden chest compartment within his robes.

Feng Ming eyes rapidly shot wide open, the words knocked out of his mouth.

There was a long pause before Feng Ming snapped out of his shock and screamed at the Regent King:

-“Rong Tian! You are disgustingly perverted!”

The high pitched outburst, echoed throughout the small lawn. Under these circumstances no one would even care whether the attendants would become suspicious!

Just as the Prince was going to attempt to pinch back the offensive handkerchief and destroy the shamefulfulness it represented, sounds of an urgent set of horse's gallop reached their ear.

-“Your Royal Highness and Regent King, Your Eminences were both here all along!”

General Tong was the cause of the interruption. The middle aged man laughed heartedly as he sat on the back of his horse.

-“We have reached an agreement with the envoy that arrived from the Country of Li. The murder of Xi Rei's official will not damage the relationship with have with them. As for the Tong Country, we have already dispatched an ultimatum, demanding them to surrender the criminals or else we will deploy our troops immediately. However, there are other matters of the state that needs to be dealt with, and if I can ask that Your Eminences would grace us with your presences in the discussion Court.”

-“I am not going!”

With his eyes fixated on the Regent King, Feng Ming was unwavering as he flat out refused the request.

-“We will go immediately, General Tong.” Rong Wang replied calm and sternly, offering the General a soft smile, and soon after he leaned closer to Feng Ming’s ear and whispered:

-“If you are obedient, I’ll return the handkerchief to you.”

-“You give it back first!” Feng Ming said bitterly under his breath.

-“No. First you have to return with me to the Court.”

-“Give it back and I’ll go!”

-“Come with me and I’ll return it to you.”

As their bickering was getting nowhere, Rong Tian turned around, to the waiting General.

-“General Tong, please go ahead of us. His Royal Highness will join you soon.”

-“Then...I shall take my leave first.”

General Tong was not a fool. Unless he was blind, anyone could read the strange expressions on the two men’s face whilst they continued to whisper to each other. The General knew something was astray so he was more than willing to ride away.

-“Feng Ming...”

Rong Wang watched and waited till General Tong was in the distance and he suddenly wrapped his arms tightly around Feng Ming bringing the Prince into a tight embrace.

-“What are you doing?”

The Prince exerted all his strength to struggle out of the hold, but it was completely fruitless. The difference between their physical strength could not be highlighted any better than this example.

-“I’m warning you. Do not provoke me to boil over.” Rong Tian threatened his dangerous dark eyes narrowed setting them onto Feng Ming’s face.

The grave expression sent fear to the boy, as Feng Ming unconsciously ceased his struggle.

Rong Tian then gently cautioned him:

- “I am really tempted to throw you onto the grass and pin you down right now and have my way with you. Do not give me an excuse to do so”

Like storm clouds approaching bringing ominous trouble and setting off barometers, Feng Ming’s eyes were alarmed as panic sank in.

Rong Wang laughed.

-“I don’t want to scare you. However, if you don’t change your behaviour sooner or later you will reap the punishment. Do I make myself clear? Let’s go to the Hall now.”

He promptly dismounted the horse, and held out his arms to carry a silent Feng Ming from his perch.

As easily the Regent King had managed to scare Feng Ming, he quickly coaxed the boy with his charm. The Prince earnestly followed in the older man’s footsteps as they both made their way back to the Courtroom.

-“When are you going to give me that handkerchief?” He asked softly as he trailed behind as they both proceeded to return to the official discussion Hall.

-“You aren’t a woman, is your skin that thin?” Rong Wang teased, not folding into the request.

-“Don’t all men have their dignity?” was the Prince’s rebuttal.

The couple’s spat continued as they argued with their voices lowered, even when they entered the hall.

-“Your Highness, we bid you well!” A chorus of men startled Feng Ming as they greeted the Crowned Prince’s entrance.

Every face in plain sight was full of respect as they paid their good wishes to the Prince. Feng Ming was speechless. Inwardly he could only think how the people of this era could easily sway their attitudes and wasn't the change ridiculously fast?

The snap finger change didn't even allow this modern man to have the luxury of giving them all a sigh first. However, since he assumed his role as the Crowned Prince it was the first time he felt admired, and it wasn't hard to let it get to his head. After all it was a good feeling to be able pleased with what he had accomplished for once.

Rong Wang immediately caught Feng Ming's smug expression so he dipped his head down towards the shorter man and whispered a caution:

-“Don't act so pleased with yourself. If they discover that you are an impostor, they will certainly be the first to drag you out to roast on the fire.”

The Regent King's words came as a bucket of cold water dumped on Feng Ming's head and it immediately washed away the smitten smile of pride on the Prince's lips.

Feng Ming cursed the man inwardly, before grinding his teeth begrudgingly.

-“I am the real Prince. You have to stop suspecting me!” He spat gingerly.

The Regent King returned with a laugh, not paying attention to the topic any more he moved to sit down in his seat.

Feng Ming followed suit and placed himself next to Rong Tian in their shared seating platform in the middle of the room.

Everyone else promptly sat in their positions, and soon enough the room was engaged with the affairs of the country.

Feng Ming originally had no interest in such tedious matters. The show of his merit yesterday was merely an anger outburst that was triggered by Rong Wang's mistreatments.

He listened for a while, barely putting any effort in focusing on the squabbling voices. It didn't take long for his mind to stray elsewhere.

-“Your Royal Highness?” A voiced called.

Feng Ming frowned as he heard his cue to join the boring conversation taking place in front of him. All this time, instead of listening attentively he had been deep in the midst of his own thoughts.

The Prince had been enwrapped in scheming how he would take White Cloud for himself, if he could somehow pry the prized horse from the Regent King's possession.

Pushing this plans aside, Feng Ming raised his head, where he unexpectedly come face to face with General Chu who was looking at him with much deference.

-“Ah?” The Prince managed, beckoning a question to be asked as he sat completely clueless to where he was meant to be involved.

-“His Majesty, why are you frowning? Is there something you are not satisfied with in the Tax policies, perhaps a problem?”

Feng Ming’s eyes shot around the room, where all his subjects were looking at him as if they were anticipating another amazing speech of power from the “new and capable” Crowned Prince.

Where the Hell was he going to pull out an awe inspiring speech?

Towards tax, accounting and finance Feng Ming didn’t have the slightest clue, nor did he ever care for learning it.

-“There’s nothing wrong, just carry out what you have just discussed.” Feng Ming hastily dismissed the issue as he nodded, casually waving the matter.

Feng Ming couldn’t get the topic off his back, as General Chu continued to stare at him strangely, after a long pause he advised the Crowned Prince:

- “However, Your Highness we haven’t been able to draw a conclusion for our tax policy negotiations...”

What a complete shame! Feng Ming was caught out in his absent mindedness and his face was faltering from his embarrassment.

Rong Tian stepped into the conversation.

“The Prince has had little contact with the happenings of the tax system hence the lack of experience and knowledge on such matters is understandable.”

The Regent King’s intermission was out of good will, offering to scrape what remained of the Prince’s pride.

Instead of helping out, Feng Ming could only feel the mockery in the man’s tone. His anger was on its way to rebirth. In addition, during his absentminded wavering he came to a realization that Rong Tian had completely taken advantage of him when they rode White Cloud.

Why did I have to help him do "that"?

When he cleaned me "down there" and kept the evidence!

Just thinking about the soiled handkerchief still in the Regent King’s possession ticked a bomb inside him.

The Prince grunted, and proudly defended his own pride out of stubbornness:

-“Rong Wang, I am afraid to tell you that your claim is wrong. It is true that I, as the Prince have not personally dealt with Tax systems and financial policy making, however I am crystal clear on the matters relating to them.”

On the side of the room, an astounded noise escaped Xi Rei’s Tax Minister, Hei’s mouth.

-“Oh?”

He was delighted to hear the Prince’s decree and showed his eagerness.

-“Then if Your Royal Highness would kindly enlighten us with his great knowledge.” He beckoned humbly.

The audience urged the Prince, displaying that enthusiasm as they waited to be gifted with another great speech of wisdom.

Feng Ming almost bit off his own troublesome tongue. He chewed on his lip in hesitation, as he actually thought about his words before he spoke:

-“Mmm...Umm...”

He sank deeper into his own trap. The Prince then whipped his eyes and pinned them fiercely onto the Regent King before answering the wishes of General.

-“Firstly, tell me the Tax policy that you are proposing and I’ll reply with my resolutions.”

However Rong Tian wasn’t letting his prey go so easily:

-“Considering His Highness is clear on the matter, why do you request a reiteration?”

A sinister smile was forming on the Regent King’s thin lips, as he found pleasure pressing Feng Ming’s buttons.

Feng Ming failed to conceal his distaste as it was clearly stamped on his face, and his complexion darkened.

With the last remark, the Prince nearly shot out his seat to grab the Regent King by the collar, wanting to challenge the man’s obnoxious and superior attitude. However, the little rationality that lived in Feng Ming stopped his impulse.

As much as he wanted to pummel that smug handsome face, he was well aware that in the end he would be suffer Rong Wang’s wrath. Keeping their arguments exclusively to words was the safer option.

As a result he put his man-beating thoughts aside, and gave the man a sneer before standing up with an air of feigned elegance. He glanced over his subjects quickly before composing himself to calmly address them.

-“There is a saying in the “Art of War”* which goes: “One must know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated.” Even though I am well versed in Tax systems and finances, such a big issue needs to be carefully analyzed and cannot be treated carelessly. It is only natural that I am first explained the details of Xi Rei’s Tax revenue system before I can deliberate and guide you.”

The flow of such clever words coming from the Prince’s mouth stunned everyone in the room, even Rong Wang who sat to his side was left speechless.

Feng Ming was bemused by the surprised faces in front of him. He managed to blow them out of the water, just like he had the day before, so he didn’t find it strange, instead he thought to himself, what his next move should be.

He had just opened his mouth at the slip of his tongue gave the bunch of military buffs a free lecture entailing essences of Sun Zi’s* “Art of War” theories mixed with modern day terminologies for politics, it would have been more strange if those words didn’t leave these “ancients” amazed.

Sure enough, after a gracious silence, everyone’s brains recovered and their eyes were shining strangely with newfound worship towards their bright Prince, almost as if they were beginning to idolize him.

General Tong then bowed to the ground, and exclaimed:

-“Your Highness’s talent and the extent of your great wisdom are unfathomable. Before your arrival, we were discussing military tactics against our enemies and the organization of our own troops. This saying “One must know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated.” is commendable. It is praise worthy and deserves to be credited to Your Highness’s sharp mind. We would never have thought that this “Art of War’s” theory could also be applicable to the Tax system, this is magnificent, pure genius!”

Feng Ming knew flattering him with “wisdom” on such matters concerning the Tax system and the “Art of War” was irrelevant, so he quickly turned the conversation back to the important topic.

He turned to face Tax Minister Hei and said:

- “Stop this nonsense! As for the pending issue, you better explain Xi Rei’s current Tax system from the beginning.”

Tax Minister Hei replied dutifully with respect to the Prince’s wishes:

-“Yes, Your Highness.”

He cleared his throat and began detailing a thorough explanation of Xi Rei’s enforced Tax system.

How was Feng Ming meant to keep his interest in this topic? There were countless terminologies he did not comprehend and they were being used repeatedly.

A frowned edged onto his face as he listened, it only took a few sentences before he started to yawn and his thought trained back to the handkerchief in Rong Wang's clutches.

He had merely boosted to put a lid over Rong Wang's troublesome mouth but in all honesty he was disinterested in what the Minister had to say. But he didn't interrupt his subject's long winded explanation about the taxes. The words simply passed in one ear and out the other. Boredom was clear on the Prince's face as the man continued to drone on.

As Feng Ming was dropping into a drowsy stupor, a sudden warm object startled him. Whatever it was, dipped into his backside under his clothing and made the boy shudder violently to the intrusion, snapping his brain out of hibernation.

That thing belonged to the Regent King, who had somehow managed to sneak closer to the Prince without him noticing.

Without a word Rong Tian's large hand stealthily dove into the covers of Feng Ming's lower robes and started to fondle his lower regions.

Due to their superior standing in the Court, they were separated from the rest and all their subjects were a decent distance away. For Feng Ming's sake, a sturdy grand table helped to obscure the actions of the wandering hand.

No one seemed to have noticed. With so many people before him, if they were exposed it would be complete humiliation taking back everything that Feng Ming had built over the two days.

Anxiety swept over Feng Ming but he didn't dare to make a sound. Rong Wang unfortunately didn't have the word "restraint" in his vocabulary and showed no signs of ceasing his action, taking Feng Ming's silence as no signs of protest, which compelled him to unbridle his behaviour.

The Regent King's invasion moved onto something more interesting, as his fondling attack travelled further south within Feng Ming's breeches, where it took liberty to seize a certain soft organ.

-“AH!” Feng Ming yelped as he basically jumped from his seat.

Everyone's eyes immediately darted to the Prince as the sudden assertion place a halt to the official's monologue.

-“Does His Highness wish to comment on the matter?”

Rong Tian's mischievous hand promptly darted out of sight the moment Feng Ming shouted out. Feng Ming let out a sigh of relief, surveying the eyes that were on him he calmly asked in response.

-“Tax Minister Hei, you said the country's Tax income is solely based on the Nobles and the slaves, and the Tax charges are based on noblemen rankings. It couldn't be possible that apart from the Nobles and the slaves that there are no other people from other classes? Don't these others have to pay taxes?”

-“For this question, please let this humble official explain to your Highness.” Rong Wang offered, answering his questions with a degree of respect.

-“Prince, the people are divided by the land they own, according to location and how many slaves live within their vicinities. The landowners can claim their power over the settlers however, they are also held responsible for covering the taxes for these slaves.”

Feng Ming gave the man a quick study, eventually restraining himself from retaliating for the trouble the Regent King caused and nodded his head.

-“I understand now, this country is socially dependant on slavery, all the land of this country is probably classified as the property of the country or to be more correct the Nobility. Everything within a Noble's territory inclusive of humans is considered to be in their possession.”

-“That’s correct.”

-“In that case...”

An ingenious idea struck Feng Ming he couldn’t even hold back his glee at the next question he was going to cast.

-“Does this mean that everything in the Imperial Palace is my property?”

-“This...”

All eyes were upon the Regent King.

Rong Wang shattered Feng Ming’s wishful thinking.

-“The Nobles of Xi Rei are under the direct control of Xi Rei’s Regent King and they are his slaves. They only listen and obey Xi Rei’s Regent King’s orders.” He said coldly cutting the threads of hope the Prince had to gain an upper hand.

-“You are simply the Crowned Prince.” He issued the next blow.

Before Feng Ming could even open his mouth to claim a bit of pride for himself, Rong Tian gave him the ultimatum:

-“This naturally means the Prince’s Palace quarters aren’t His Highness’s property.”

-“Humph!”

Feng Ming certainly knew the meaning behind the words. It was obviously a hidden warning, so the boy bitterly refuted.

-“Countries which are completely dependent on slavery are outdated. The only advantage is merely the subjective motivation * they have is to exploit the land mass and expand the country’s perimeters, so the country’s power can rise.”

-“Oh?”

The complexity in Feng Ming’s words set awe in his listeners, and Tax Minister Hei was first to show his interests as the official beckoned the Prince for more.

-“Your Highness, what is a subjective motivation? Does it possess that much power? How can we attain it?”

-“It is not an object, but an actual type of attitude.”

Feng Ming scratched his head, it was tricky, and he wasn’t able to clarify what he had meant and he personally didn’t want to explain it.

As he thought over the new problem his eyes met with the Regent King’s, who was openly mocking him with the smile stretched across his smug face.

Feng Ming was stirred up by the Rong Wang's intentional irritation, determined to not let Rong Tian to dominate him, in terms of wit.

-“In other words, if you were in the position of a slave and every day you are forced to work, knowing there is no prospects or rewards, then labouring would become meaningless, and one's work ethics would fall. Given that you aren't a slave, and have freedom to work hard and receive benefits and rewards for your efforts, you work harder. If everyone in this country is given this mentality, then Xi Rei is guaranteed to prosper in riches and power. This is precisely why slavery should be abolished as this kind of social structure does not benefit the country in the long run.”

-“What the Prince has just said, is this a method to control the people?” Rong Wang asked sternly.

-“So to speak...” Feng Ming nodding in confirmation, before turning to the man and in a low voice he demanded:

- “Give me back that handkerchief.”

Rong Wang's replied in a whispered.

-“It is my incentive to work harder. It's my subjective motivation.” He teased.

Feng Ming froze on the spot, like he was punched in the face every emotion tied with anger started to well up.

General Chu interrupted the hate as he commented:

-“Forgive this humble General’s stupidity, however this subjective motivation Your Highness speaks of, although it sounds interesting. How do we go about applying this method in practice?”

-“As for the current military in Xi Rei, how are the upper positions appointed and what determines the hierarchy?”

-“Yours humbles General originate from Nobles bloodlines of servicemen. We have been taught martial arts since childhood. The Country of Xi Rei requires selection of officials by the process of one’s prestige from esteemed family backgrounds to avoid contamination with commoners.”

Feng Ming slapped his knee in frustration before condemning what he was told:

-“That’s the problem! A selection system solely based on one’s bloodline... No wonder Xi Rei is challenged by so many enemies! The best solution is to base selection by an individual’s abilities, for positions in the military and to rise in the ranks. So whoever possesses the integrity, merit and talent can have the opportunity to become a High official. Hence, this will drive each individual to strive for promotions, and as a result it will naturally promote competition and enhance the quality of our soldiers.”

General Tong cried out in disbelief:

-“If this was to happen, wouldn’t any plain civilian be able to become a high ranking official? That is preposterous! It must not happen!”

-“Why shouldn’t this be allowed?”

Feng Ming’s eyes flashed at the General and he rebuked the outcry:

“This is the best solution in selecting candidates within the army, worthy of a high position and we won’t be wasting precious talents. “Heroes are born without boundaries”, do you understand?”

With his impassioned remark, Feng Ming pretty much managed to provoke every member of the crowd, as each were willing to offer a counter argument to his plans.

-“This... This ...is nonsense!”

-“It’s not tradition...”

Feng Ming was just one voice against a whole room full of old coots. His face was red with anger, when he left the discussion Hall. He was fuming with rage as he stomped back to the Prince’s quarters.

Rong Wang followed his blazing trail of fury and when they entered the Prince’s chambers, he ordered the servants out and quickly grabbed Feng Ming and embraced him tightly in his arms.

-“Let go of me! You bunch of fools, how can you not comprehend such a simple reason. It can’t possibly be that all ancient folks are completely brainless?”

The Regent King laughed at the bitter lashes of words sprouting from the Prince’s pretty little mouth.

-“Don’t be so hasty, I know what you said is right. “Heroes are born without boundaries”.

He clicked his tongue:

-“I would have never imagined that you can be so impressive, conjuring all these reasoning by yourself.”

-“That’s right, compared to you idiots who depend on your family status and blood heritage to rise in ranks, I am stronger!” Feng Ming spat.

-“Why the temper? Such good reasoning indeed must be heard. However, you can’t be impulsive. All matters that require adjustments can be fine tuned from within and can be carried out away from prying eyes.”

Rong Wang held Feng Ming closer to his own body, they were basically plastered together.

-“The country is in my hands, what is there that I can’t do?” He said in an intimate voice that tickled Feng Ming’s ears.

Under the candlelight, the Regent King’s words revealed his dark ambitions.

Feng Ming suddenly lifted his head, studied the face above him. Even he could feel that the man before him was valiant and extraordinarily handsome.

This type of man was destined to become a legend that would last an eternity.

-“What’s the matter? Why are you staring at so intently at me?”

Feng Ming didn’t reply and instead asked him seriously:

-“I am capable of making you the ruler of all under the Heavens, do you believe me? Even if you are a Cao Cao, I will still help you.”

-“The King of King’s?”

A smile emerged on Rong Wang’s lips. He gazed down at the young man in his arms and gently replied:

-“I believe you. Since I first laid eyes on you, I knew you were something different altogether.”

-“You want me to help you?”

Rong Wang nodded his head, and asked outright:

-“What are your conditions?”

-“There are two.”

-“Tell me then.”

-“First, return the handkerchief you have in your pocket. The second...”

Feng Ming conjured up his bravery, and placed his neck on the chopping board:

-“Let me top you once!”

Feng Ming didn't know whether this kind of tactic could be considered as rape.

Chapter Eleven

His audacious words immediately swept silence across the large chambers, creating an eerie tomb.

A stifling force of embarrassment smacked the Prince. He bowed his head timidly.

How pathetic! Instead of this sorry display he should have held his head high and stood with his chest out, self satisfied and smugly waiting the response of his servant, Rong Wang's answer. Moreover, this was an opportunity to stir Rong Wang.

The Prince contemplated making that handsome face fault just by shooting a frivolous glance to show the vulgar intentions he had, hoping then he would be able to bask triumphantly in the Regent King's shame. Unfortunately, he didn't have the balls to act out his plan.

-“Let me top you once?” Rong Tian repeated and his voice remained normal.

-“Yes.” Feng Ming confirmed, nodding his bowed head.

The arms around his waist slowly tightened their hold, gently imprisoning the Prince.

-“However, is there a reason for “only” once?”
Rong Tian whispered.

-“If it was me, I would definitely have said “a lifetime”.”

-“Would you agree to a lifetime?”

-“You are so sure that I would not consent?”

His lips pulled back into a sneer, the Regent King’s attitude exposed crucial clues. Rong Tian’s eyes stared dangerously at him and Feng Ming began to fear the outcome of this conversation.

The Regent King’s thin lips softly rose as he questioned:

-“Be honest, why did you even mention such a ridiculous requirement?”

Feng Ming felt at this moment as if he was a naughty child being reprimanded.

-“That’s because I need to strike first to gain the upper hand.” He replied in a low voice, and returned Rong Wang’s look with a hearty hate-filled glare.

-“Don’t think I’m not aware of your heart’s dirty desires!” He blurted out.

-“Oh? My dirty desires?” The Regent King teased.

Feng Ming couldn't stand the oppressive atmosphere the Regent King held over him so with a renewed dignity he whipped his angry face upwards and stared intently at the man.

-“Don't you dare deny it! You've had perverted thoughts of me from the very beginning. Don't think that I'm a fool not to notice. Rather than letting me be eaten by you, it would be better to let me top you, besides the newspaper articles I've read said that being the receiver hur-mm-mpf...nnnnhhh...nnnnhhh...”

The concluding words of Feng Ming's rambling were timely cut off as Rong Tian worked his skilful mouth over the soft full lips.

As usual, when their lips locked the young man's heartbeat raced and his chest heaved like a bellow desperately sucking in air. He was again drawn into a fit of frenzied passion which left him in a daze which included losing control of his own body as it melted with the heat of the moment.

When their kiss finally broke, Feng Ming gasped for breath. By the time he calmed down he was completely leaning within the crook of the Regent King's strong arm.

-“Hey! Where are you taking me?” He shrieked as his weakened body was swept up in a sudden motion.

In fact, it was a needless question their destination as both men were clearly heading towards the Prince's bedroom. Feng Ming immediately tensed.

Rong Wang sent his reassurance, bowing his head to whisper with a smile:

- "Didn't His Majesty give me his requirements? Given such an alluring condition, who in this world could refuse?"

Feng Ming was taken back because he never conceived his business proposition to run so smoothly. He almost bit his tongue again when he found the words to reply.

- "So you agree?"

He studied the Regent King with disbelief.

- "I agree."

Rong Tian moved effortlessly with his bounty and placed the Prince on top of the bed.

- "To have me allow you to top once, actually isn't necessary. Under these circumstances when both parties are willing, if you wanted more I would give my consent without an issue with it."

Feng Ming's jaw basically dropped off his face.

- "Well, go ahead."

Rong Wang's perfect features were closing in on his own face and the man's voice was thicker than velvet as he showed no signs of hiding his delight.

The scent of desire flowed from the Regent King, his lust thickened in the air, swamping the Prince's senses. Feng Ming almost fell into Rong Tian's bewitching pace. He shied his face away from the man's poison.

He was hesitating.

-“I...”

His face seared with glowing red embers.

-“I've never had any official...”

-“I see.”

The Regent King smiled tentatively, as if it wasn't a problem. His large hands rested on the Prince's shoulders and they stroked the boy reassuringly.

-“In this case, let me guide His Royal Highness.”
He offered genuinely.

To be address as His Royal Highness, at this moment touched Feng Ming.

Sure enough, the Regent King began to carefully guide him.

-“Love between men, in fact, is the same as that between a man and woman. In Xi Rei we have a traditional custom, where young men live and learn from an experienced adult man. Learning skills and to develop courage and perseverance, the matters of the body can also be taught by direct contact of the mentor during this learning phase, so a majority of men have experience in this aspect...”

Concurrent with his lecturing Rong Tian’s large coarse hands were fondling all parts of the Prince, the boy’s ears were practically scarlet.

Feng Ming barely managed to defend himself:

-“It’s not like I’ve never had any experience, I’ve simply forgot that’s all!”

Hearing the Prince’s quibbling, the Regent King reached unexpectedly to a pink erect rose bud on the boy’s chest and gave it a forceful twist. The boy body’s reacted as his spine curled under the hold.

Feng Ming released a whimper, his body loosening to the assault and he collapsed powerless on top of the bed. His clothes were splayed out beneath his body. The numerous layers had been worked off his body by Rong Tian

-“Looking at the Prince’s seductive composure, it is difficult to believe that he has ever engaged in such intimate experiences.”

The King ridiculed him:

- “Only that it has been forgotten.”

His mischievous hands gradually teased Feng Ming’s body till it was burning with desire.

At that point Rong Tian left the bed and moved towards a cabinet to retrieve a small bottle. Tipping the entire contents of the vial into his palms a pool of viscous liquid formed which vaguely had the scent of pleasant fresh herbs.

Taking half of the volume he applied the cool liquid onto his own body and the remaining portion was eased onto Feng Ming’s flaccid member.

The Regent King gently coaxed the modest length of muscle to harden in his grasp. Under the rhythmic strokes of the warm wet hand, Feng Ming was easily aroused and his penis ached for more attention. His own body twisted in the man’s unceasing touch. His voice was trapped in his throat as he made small animal sounds.

-“I would have never thought you’d be so enthusiastic.” The man teased.

-“Nonsense! I’m topping you, it’s only natural I get this passionate.”

-“Well, I’m ready to have you on top.”

A gentle smile eased across the Regent King's lips, he reached to help steady the Prince into a straddling position on top of his own body.

Feng Ming felt a little light-headed as his brain was in overload and shooting him warnings.

-“This doesn't seem right.”

Rong Wang laughed as he asked:

-“Where is the problem?”

“You should have your legs open and I shouldn't be sitting with my legs open on top.”

-“Is that so?”

The Regent King snaked his hand around Feng Ming's slender waist and gently adjusted the boy until his hardened and erect member softly nudged at the Prince's tightly closed entrance.

Feng Ming whimpered as the strange sensation sent the boy reeling, his hips immediately twisted away from the stimulus.

An indescribable noise was choked back in the boy's throat from his surprise.

-“Feng Ming...”

Rong Wang's voice was exceptionally husky as he beckoned the younger man. He clasped his free hand around Feng Ming's arousal, comforting the length that was on the verge of exploding.

Feng Ming's brain was in a muddle, as the older man drowned him in pleasure stroke by stroke, tugging at every nerve of sensation.

In the final moment, as Feng Ming reached his climax a soft pressure was applied to the tip of his aching muscle, blocking the exit for the fluids of his passion.

Under the Regent King's cruel control which stopped his release, Feng Ming nearly broke into tears.

He cried out his captor's name without thinking:
-“Unnh...Rong Tian.”

-“Not bad, you seem to recall my name now.”

The man was satisfied, presenting a smug grin. Rong Tian propped his upper half up and pulled Feng Ming into his arms, one hand fixed firmly around the boy's waist to hold him in place and the other continued to torment the boy's desperate member.

He laughed lightly:
- “Feng Ming, I'm going to let you release... Does that sound good?”

Damn you!

Why would you even ask such a question? What part of that doesn't sound good?

The arrow has already been drawn back on the bow there's nothing more to do but shoot!

However, this wasn't the time to lecture him with any strange phrases. Feng Ming couldn't find his voice so he hurriedly nodded his head. His eyes glimmered with pleasure as they signalled and pleaded with the Regent King.

Rong Wang sneered, then loosened his firm grip around Feng Ming's penis and quickly gave the member a gentle squeeze. The Prince quivered in his arms.

-“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!” Feng Ming screamed, his body completely softened and slumped into a mass on top of Rong Wang.

Warm white bodily fluid had squirted all over Rong Tian's hand. The boy's eyes closed as his body savoured the moment.

At this time Rong Wang moved to whisper into the Prince's ears:

-“Feng Ming the transaction has been completed.”

-“What?”

The Prince’s chest was still catching all the air it could manage to help recover from his dismal state he even struggled to open his eyes.

When his hazy eyes managed to partially open, the look of Feng Ming’s face was a captivating sight.

-“You have released yourself on top of me, hasn’t your terms been met?”

This comment cleared Feng Ming’s mind immediately. He shook his head urgently to reclaim the deal:

-“No, this isn’t. This doesn’t count!”

His frustration wasn’t hidden on his face.

-“How can this not count?”

The Regent King pressed the man who was flailing frantically in his arms.

His rich voice whispered deviously into the boy’s ear:

-“The evidence is conclusive, or shall I send for an imperial guard to pass his judgment on the matter?”

-“How can you call a guard to testify such matters? Anyway, this doesn’t count!” Feng Ming indignantly stammered with anger.

Rong Tian expression snapped, his face pulled back and he raised an eyebrow.

-“I want to very much commit something to offend Your Highness...”

-“What?”

-“You haven’t realized that you were the only one who had the pleasure of being released. Likewise, I haven’t been comforted in such a manner.”

With this comment, Rong Wang pointed towards his erection and its generous length hit the air like a skyscraper.

Immediately, all the fierceness behind Feng Ming’s fangs vanished when he had initially decided argued with the Regent King.

Fearing what was installed ahead he turned away from the Regent King’s weapon and swallowed the knot in his throat before timidly voicing himself:

-“But you really didn’t comply with the agreement...”

Under the frightening power of Rong Tian’s gaze the last few words automatically disappeared from Feng Ming’s mouth. The eyes that fixed onto his naked and vulnerable body completely stripped any ounce of fight left inside of him.

-“Sleep now.” Rong Tian unexpectedly ordered.

His eagle like eyes watched the bowed head for a while before finally sighing:

-“Otherwise, I really can’t resist.”

Feng Ming was aware that the Regent King was telling the truth. This was only a matter of time and place. He wasn’t going to dare risk the “truth” by trying to explain the facts on how their agreement has not been completed now.

The moment the Regent King loosened his grip, the Prince didn’t hesitate to jump into the covers of his sleeping pallet. He quickly drew the heavy quilts over his naked body ensuring he carefully covered any part of him that may lead to alluring the other.

-“I will take a bath.”

Rong Wang finally got off the bed. Before he departed the King swivelled around and dropped his face down to Feng Ming’s level, cautioning him:

-“You were meant to go with me however in this state if we shared a bath something would surely happen between us. I don’t want you to go biting your tongue again.”

Feng Ming discovered at that point that Rong Wang actually had a fear of his “suicidal tendencies”. It must have engrained a deep impression for him to withhold his actions.

This was one messed up evening.

Originally the Prince was going to have his wishes granted unfortunately he was cheated on their bargain.

However, if it was the matter of deception, he couldn't really lump different matters together. Considering the Regent King's power and the fact that he had repressed his needs was good.

Also... Rong Wang's technique isn't too bad with his hands...

As Feng Ming had these thoughts in his mind, Rong Tian had already finished with his cleansing and promptly returned.

Upon hearing the man's footsteps Feng Ming hastily closed his eyes feigning sleep.

Rong Tian stripped out of his garments, and entered the warm covers of Feng Ming's quilts.

When Feng Ming was suddenly drawn into the Regent King's embrace from behind, his heart raced erratically, scared stiff whether Rong Tian would try anything on him tonight.

Suffering in silence, he waited for a long time, and seeing there was no further activity from the man, Feng Ming could finally relax.

So there are still really people that honour their words, or perhaps the ancient folks have strong morals?

No, impossible!

This Regent King has shown his true self previously.

The word moral doesn't even exist in his vocabulary.

Otherwise why would the original Prince have so many scars on his body?

Feng Ming imagination ran wild before his thought patterns waned. His concluding thoughts fixed on how warm and cosy it was to be hugged by the Regent King.

Managing to tire himself out, his mind slipped into a daze and he gradually drifted off to dreamland.

Chapter Twelve

The following morning Feng Ming's eyes fluttered open with the warmth of the rising sun. Shortly after, the memories of last night's activities flooded back into his mind. He could not help but to blush from ear to ear.

He contemplated for a while on what to do, but decided in any case he had to face the Regent King so he prepared for the worst and committed himself to confront his bed partner. His gritted as he rolled over to give Rong Tian a good stare down.

Once he had moved, he was surprised to discover the man who had embraced him as they shared the bed for the night was nowhere to be found and in fact had disappeared without a trace.

In a flash, an overwhelming anger hit him, feeling dejected by the desertion discontent bubbled from the depths of his heart.

Feng Ming sat himself up on the bed and stared blankly at the spot where the Regent King had slept. His slender fingers reached for the surface of the bed that was still warm where the man had laid and remained slightly depressed from the older man's weight.

Why did he leave in a hurry?

Chiu Lan was outside, waiting on her Master to wake. Hearing the shuffling inside the Prince's chambers prompted her to enter and assist the Prince to change into his new outfit.

-“Chiu Lan...”

-“Your Highness, what is the matter?”

Feng Ming dipped his head, thought about it briefly and decided to not pursue the matter.

He shook his head.

-“Forget about it.”

Is it possible that Rong Wang is even more thin skin than me?

Was he was too embarrassed to see me so he made his break before morning?

The idea of the Regent King scrambling in panic before taking flight made his stomach twitch, though it was more likely due to hunger.

Luckily, Chiu Lan had also brought his meal.

Feng Ming indulged his imagination over the question “Why?” as he ate his breakfast absentmindedly.

For the past few days, Rong Tian had been turning up to his quarters like clockwork, bright and early every morning.

As much as Feng Ming didn’t welcome the man, the Regent King did provide some type of muse for Feng Ming upon each visit.

Boredom can make one desperate.

Feng Ming found the Regent King annoying whenever he hung around however when Rong Tian was absent, something inside him missed his daily “Muse”.

After taking his meal, he waited for four hours hoping that something would happen.

His impatience hit the roof when nothing more than insects paid him any attention. So he decided to try his luck and see whether he could escape out of the Prince’s quarters again.

Considering it wasn't his first time, he knew the chances were slim given that every other time the guards easily caught him. As if it had become a routine for him to try and only be dragged back to his confines. He was beginning to treat their daily episodes as good exercise.

He stealthily stuck his head out to check the coast was clear around his chamber before attempting a dash to escape the guarded doors of the hall's main entrance.

Sure enough, as soon as he stepped foot outside the perimeter, he smacked into someone's chest and that someone immediately arrested Feng Ming.

The strong grip hauled His Highness back into his cage. Only this time his handler wasn't a Palace guard, it was the Regent King himself.

-“What? You can't tolerate staying still for a second?” He chided.

The Regent King released his hold on Feng Ming's collar and dragged him along to sit down next to him at a table before ordering Chiu Lan to bring a hot meal.

-“Prepare our meal and bring some light refreshments.”

When Chiu Lan left the two, Feng Ming studied the Regent King's face where he didn't sense signs of

awkwardness from their activities in bed. This allowed him to ease his concerns.

Not before long, Chiu Lan returned and promptly placed dozens of delicious snacks and down on the table before excusing herself.

“Haven’t you had lunch?” Rong Tian asked as he reached for his chopsticks and picked up a Palace made savoury dumpling. He gladly fed himself and chewed it delicately then nodded to the Prince.

Instead of a reply Feng Ming interrogated the Regent King:

- “Where did you go so early in the morning?”

Rong Tian suddenly snorted at the question, a smile pulled across his lips as he studied the boy.

Feng Ming went red, the eyes that pinned down on him was making him flustered. However, that was short lived as he defended himself angrily.

-“Don’t you mistake it as if I’m concerned about you.” He spat.

-“Why do you blush so easily? What are you ashamed of?”

Rong Wang shuffled in his seat and outstretched his hand for Feng Ming’s waist.

-“Come over here.” He commanded the Prince.

-“What are you going to do?”

The boy looked at him with suspicious eyes.

-“You have to sit on my lap.”

-“Get out! I’m not a ‘call girl’” Offended Feng Ming struggled away from the swaying hand in front of him.

-“What’s a call girl?”

Feng Ming face pulled back in a grimace, he stuck out his tongue at the Regent King:

-“It’s not like you’d ever have the fortune to see one. She’s a beautiful woman of goddess like proportions.”

With that said the Prince dodged the hand that shot out for him again, and he escaped to sit the furthest he could manage from Rong Wang’s position.

Rong Tian looked at Feng Ming’s display, rested the pair of chopsticks then calmly reached into his chest pocket and drew out yesterday’s offending handkerchief.

The younger man’s eyes widened like saucers as soon as he caught the first glimpse of the white material.

He suddenly jumped up and demanded angrily:

-“That’s mine! Give it back to me, we had a deal!”

Rong Wang gave him a scandalous smile.

-“I’ve only received half of your deposit and if you succeed in assisting me to become the “Ruler of All” then I’ll happily return the rest to you.”

He then tucked the handkerchief back into the cavities of his garments.

Feng Ming just stared at him in disbelief but his mouth rushed to rescue the situation.

-“You can’t possibly be serious! Are you planning to keep something that’s dirty on you all the time?”

Feng Ming pinched his nose to exemplify how possibly unhygienic it was to carry something that had been soiled. His face then scrunched up into a scowl, having his hand and face occupied making his disgust Feng Ming completely dropped his guard.

Seizing the opportunity, the Regent King abruptly snatched the boy’s wrists immobilizing the smaller man and drew him into his arms and subsequently pressed his mouth tightly against the scowling pair, kissing any rebuke out of them.

-“Feng Ming you are so attractive...”

-“Hey! You aren’t allowed to be rude to the Prince!”

When the Regent King satisfied his quota of kisses, he reluctantly released the boy and sternly asked:

-“Feng Ming, are you really the Prince himself?”

From the beginning Feng Ming has always stood his ground on this question so he immediately nodded.

-“There is no need to lie to me, even if you are not the “real” Prince, I will protect you.”

-“I have no need to lie to you from my head to toes which part of me isn’t the real Prince?”

His answers were becoming cyclic.

Rong Wang stared at the defiant boy momentarily before commenting:

- “From your words and your behaviour, all is in total contrast to the original Prince. You are completely two separate people.”

All of a sudden, his voice turned sinister as he asked the next question:

-“Feng Ming, you have to be honest, are you using some type of “soul possession”?”

As the Regent King finished this eerie question, the words practically hit Feng Ming. He jolted on the spot and his body was frightened stiff.

He had reflected on his own experiences so far, and was sure that no one in this backward ancient civilization could possibly comprehend his situation.

The fact that anyone in Xi Rei could understand “possession” was insane. In his case, the term “soul possession” could be partially be used to described what had happened to him and his journey to his new world.

Rong Tian had what he wanted. He had purposely asked the question to elicit a reaction from the mysterious character and judging from the boy’s strange display the Regent King was already connecting the evidence in his mind.

He let out a sigh:

- “So this is really the case then.”

-“The thing is... This is a really a very very complicated and long story and it’s probably longer that the longest river of Xi Rei.”

Feng Ming gulped as his mouth went on the defence. He actually had no idea how long the longest river in Xi Rei was but he was buying time to figure out how he could stop Rong Wang from misunderstanding why he had deceived him from the beginning.

Shaking his head, he decided it was only best if he explained the facts to the Regent King.

Rong Wang immediately interrupted his explanation asking him seriously:

-“Feng Ming, how many people know of you using “soul possession”?”

Seeing the intense expression on the Regent King’s face, Feng Ming couldn’t help to get scared.

He desperately shook his head and in a small voice replied:

-“I’ve always said I was the Prince himself.”

-“Do you understand what it means to commit “soul possession” in Xi Rei?”

The blood drained from Feng Ming’s face as he stood without an answer for a while then he bitterly replied:

-“Rong Tian, don’t you dare threaten me by telling me you will have me burnt to a crisp.”

-“In terms of “soul possession”, Xi Rei’s history records this type of paranormal events in ancient fables. It starts when a soul of the “dead” with the help of an external power invades and steals the body of a living being, eventually killing the host and expelling the original soul. Additionally, to survive in its borrowed body the occupant will need to devour the life force of another being each day. In Xi Rei, if an individual is suspected of committing such dark magic, they would be captured and be publicly executed. They must undergo a cruel death, being sliced piece to piece until they are dead, the act ensuring no other human will fall victim to the evil.”

Feng Ming shuddered to the information he was dealt.

The punishment was on par with the sickening “Death of a Thousand Cuts” * that was reinforced as capital punishment by a famous Eunuch during the Ming dynasty of China!

Feng Ming’s complexion changed with the blood curdling images that flashed into his mind, he tugged at Rong Wang’s sleeve.

-“Hey, it’s not like I was the one that killed the Prince! I haven’t even harmed anyone you can’t charge me of any crime.”

Rong Tian tipped his head lower to the boy, who by now was wearing fear on his face.

-“Well, I’m not saying you are guilty of a crime.”

The beautiful black eyes were stricken with fright. The usual lively light they held had dimmed as the younger man stood stiff. Seeing the boy’s state the Regent King could not refrain from smiling.

-“Do not be afraid as no one knows your condition. I believe that you are not an evil spirit, otherwise, the first person you would have killed would have been I.”

Relieved Feng Ming regained his composure:

-“As long as you know, Rong Tian, don’t you dare to threaten me instead you should hurry up and tell me how you came up with the idea of “soul possession”.”

The Prince paused:

-“Also, tell me how you are going to deal with me now?”

Another hesitation before he gulped.

He asked suspiciously:

-“You can’t possibly be serious about dragging me out to be executed, right?”

-“This morning, I left to practice martial arts, coincidentally as I made my way around the Palace I came across part of the Palace chamberlain quarters and there in one room something caught my eye. After investigating I found the room was filled with a collection of relics and sacrificial offerings. I was suspicious, so I immediately summoned the servants living in that quarter to explain themselves. After interrogation they confessed that the Prince’s strange behaviour had made them all recall the stories of “body possession” and in fear they had prepared for a ritual to seek their ancestor’s protection from evil spirits.”

Rong Wang provided a complete understatement that in fact the servants involved were all tortured to confess the truth of their actions.

Feng Ming innocently asked as he remained proud of his efforts thus far as “Prince”:

-“I have always felt I’ve performed my act very well... How did they discover me?”

-“Within the Palace, there are countless people that watch each and every move you make. Why would it be strange if someone suspected you? Given the situation, the only and the quickest solution was to suppress the problem, I have already had the servants involved executed.”

-“You what!?” Feng Ming cried out in disbelief.

Since the very beginning Feng Ming was at least thankful that he was given the role of being a Prince, compared to a servant. But nothing would have prepared him to meet a man that could treat human lives so lightly.

-“W-why?” Feng Ming asked still shell shocked at the cold blooded man in front of him.

-“They were only scared, but why did you have to kill them?”

-“Feng Ming, you are too simple and need to pay attention to your own identity.”

The Prince looked like he was going to pass out, so the Regent King ushered the younger man to sit down.

His voiced lowered to a menacing tone:

- “You are the Crowned Prince of Xi Rei, on top of foreign disputes, even within the country there are countless people who would better see you dead to an early grave.”

-“On this occasion you’ve manage to make mistakes on your behaviour. People are always on the watch for your flaws, once they have a reason it would only take a matter of time for rumours to spread. They will seek every opportunity to have you executed. All they need is an excuse and this time you gave them an interesting excuse.”

It goes without saying the flowery nature filled Palace of great splendour Feng Ming had liked to envisage himself imprisoned in of was completely shattered with the Regent King’s dark words.

Feng Ming worst nightmares levelled up, it wasn’t the Regent King he should be worried about but the countless traps set out by anonymous enemies waiting for him to turn his back. They were around him waiting to pounce given the chance and now the palace was more apparent as a living hell rather than a place of luxury.

The thought made the Prince shiver.

-“However...” The younger man hesitated.

-“However... What? A Prince fearing his own country would shake the very foundations of the nation’s system and prestige. The Imperial Palace is a horrible

place of treachery. As your soul “possesses” the Prince’s body, you will have to live in his place. Accept your duties as the Crowned Prince. If it was the original Prince in your place this event of “soul possession” by an evil spirit would merely be another a rumour. Do you think perpetrators of the rumours will get off lightly? I purposely stayed in the Prince’s chambers to provide a warning to those who target you that your identity has been acknowledged by me. Hence no one is permitted to question your status and if they do I shall take them as directly challenging me.”

Feng Ming forced a smile:

-“Rong Tian, I'm getting confused, what did you mean by my fear?”

Rong Wang caressed his cheek, smiled softly and replied with no rush to his words:

-“The knowledge you have to gain about the Palace, would take more than ten years of studies to accomplish. For now the most important aspect is that you should remember exercise caution regardless of where you are and you must not be brash in your actions, try to fight that hardhead of yours.”

-“Rong Tian, are you not afraid of me? I am a ghost after all...”

The Regent King burst into a fit of laughter, exhilarated by Feng Ming’s rather silly question.

-“I’ve come across the most fascinating creature I’ve met during my whole lifetime, and that’s you, you little demon.”

Then his voice lightened as he exclaimed:

-“There’s something I am even more worried about.”

Feng Ming was getting nervous, having no idea what Rong Tian was on about.

-“What do you mean?”

-“The Original Prince’s body was not bad. However it couldn’t withstand the love making between men. His entrance was too tight and easily tore so each time he ended up with injuries. If you really possess the original Prince’s body, how am I going to fix this problem?”

Feng Ming was stunned like a fish out of water. His mouth was left gaping and his eyes pierced the Regent King with his trademark deadly stare.

After a long awkward period, something inside the Prince finally snapped as incoherent roars of anger burst from his lips before he finally shouted:

- “Rong Tian what did you just say you are going to do with the Crowned Prince? Get out of here!!”

As one can well imagine even with all the screaming the result was that it didn't convince the Regent King to retreat from the Prince's quarters.

Instead Rong Wang had managed to intimidate the poor boy till he was too scared to give a fight.

The imitation obediently sat down and picked up a brush to begin practicing his imitations of the original Prince's calligraphy skills.

Feng Ming understood that getting his writing down to pat equated to staying alive and if he got caught as a fake there were dire consequences which most likely would be fatal.

All he could do now was to surrender to the Regent King. He was reluctant to be this man's student, but Rong Tian was his life line.

Even Feng Ming wasn't that stupid to throw it away, so he was now renewed with determination to commence studying the art of being the original Prince.

For two consecutive months, Rong Tian continuously dragged Feng Ming to participate government proceedings and requested sermons on the awe inspiring theories that the mysterious boy had in his mind.

Each day Rong Wang accompanied Feng Ming to study the world around him as well as the Crowned Prince's own history.

In regards to how Feng Ming felt towards his new regime, he was obviously miserable but none the less he through his hardship and torture, Xi Rei and the world beyond was becoming a clearer picture.

Even his ugly calligraphy skills that could make a grown man laugh now was forming into strokes of art.

Chapter Thirteen

On December 20th the Imperial Palace was welcomed with the chill of winter. Additionally this date was the Empress of Xi Rei's birthday.

Rong Wang was concerned with organizing the Palace into shape for this grand occasion which was part of Xi Rei's tradition.

Naturally, the festivity was to be arranged by him, and with the Regent King's orders, each and every flag post hoisted a colourful flag, vibrant lanterns decorated the eaves of the Palace, lively fine silk banners adorned mantles and silk screens were renewed.

In addition to these stunning arrangements candles were alit throughout the halls, their fiery flame used to wish the Empress longevity and youth.

A hundred of the imperial Courtesans and officials also brought tributes to Her Majesty, most had arrived bearing fascinating trinkets or priceless treasures. The worldly presents had been gathered and delivered to the Empress early in the morning.

Throughout the year, the Queen remained faceless, only on her birthday would she venture out to her subjects dressed in the grandest of ceremonial costumes. Topped with her sovereign crown she would sit on her throne and wait company in the Empress's hall located in the centre of the Inner Palace, normally a region dedicated to women only.

Routinely on the day of the Empress's birthday, one hundred of Xi Rei's high Court officials would be led by His Royal Highness to pay her Eminence a visit. Today was no exception, everyone was waiting for the Prince to arrive and collect the well-wishers.

However, that very Prince they were waiting on was gloriously throwing a fit of rage within the Prince's chambers and had yet to front his entourage.

-“*WHAT?*” He screamed at Rong Tian.

-“You are talking about my ‘mother’?”

The Prince was suddenly forced to wear a set of extravagant robes after taking a bath. Feng Ming was completely stumped by the news which hit him out of the blue.

-“I actually have a mother, the Empress?” He uttered in disbelief.

-“What is so strange? Everyone has parents. Although Xi Rei’s King has been in a coma for countless years, the Empress, your mother has always maintained her duties within the Inner Palace. The Empress enjoys her peace and rarely makes an appearance outside of her confines.”

Feng Ming stared at the Regent King firmly, showing his dissatisfaction and he quickly paced back and forth bickering at the sudden misfortune looming overhead.

-“Why bring this up with me now? This is such a big matter and you suddenly want me to bring a hundred officials to accompany me to make a formal visit to “my” mother.”

He stammered before hissing angrily:

- “My god! She will sense something is wrong!”

Feng Ming turned to the Regent King and nervously grabbed the man firmly:

-“A mother knows best, she’ll see right through me like glass!”

-“That’s why I am telling you now. This will test you for the past two months of study you’ve undertaken and to verify what you have learnt. You’ve covered Palace Etiquette so to have you bring out the basic framework of the Prince is not impossible. To conceal your true identity to the people, you need to be able to satisfy the Empress. If you can’t even convince a woman

who spends most of her time hidden away within the Inner Palace, in the future when you travel to represent the country on envoys of diplomacy, you'll indefinitely be exposed as an impostor."

Feng Ming was like a broken record. He repeated the strange words he just heard:

-“In the future I will travel...”

-“You are the Crowned Prince. Naturally there are many places that you will need to visit in order to establish ties with other countries.”

Rong Wang stationed the younger man in front of himself before reaching to assist the Prince to straighten the delicate garment which the boy had scrunched under his holdout of his near nervous breakdown.

-“Don't be scared, the Empress is a docile individual. Particularly, she and An He did not often share the best relationship. Just relax and she will not see through your act. Besides, I will be there with you.”

With the Regent King's words, Feng Ming felt the weight on his heart lighten, however it stroked his suspicious.

-“How come the Prince and the Empress don't often meet? Aren't they mother and son?”

Rong Wang hesitated before answering:

-“The customs within the Royal Palace are like this, you’ll slowly get accustomed to it. Anyhow, the Prince was rather disappointing as a result the Empress was not particularly proud of him nor did she favour him in any light.”

Although Feng Ming was clear that Rong Tian was talking about the “Original Prince”, he still found it offensive and gave the older man a deadly glare to show his discontent.

Rong Wang chuckled, amused by the boy’s reaction, so he corrected himself:

-“The former Prince was the disappointing one where as on the other hand you are the complete opposite.”

Rong Tian’s large hands shuffled down to stroke at the shorter man’s slender waist. Feng Ming laughed in response to the man’s fondling.

The playful couple lingered in the Prince’s chambers for a good period of time, unnerving the hundred officials and servants that had assembled and waited for the two in a large courtyard near the Inner Palace.

When the two important figures finally emerged from the Prince’s halls a flood of relief washed over the servants. The pair finally marched on, heading towards

the courtyard to address their entourage before leading them to greet the Empress.

As they reached the boundary walls of the Inner Palace, voices of celebration rang through the air as did the sound of string and wind instruments.

The festivities could not strip away the fact that at this very moment, Feng Ming was going to step foot into the ultimate exam to authenticate his identity. His heart could not help but beat hard against his rib cage. Panic was running through his brain.

He suddenly halted before the entrance of the courtyard where his subjects were waiting. His hand shook as it tugged at Rong Tian's sleeves, completely grasping onto the material with a death grip.

Rong Wang witnessed the colour drain from Feng Ming's face, fear glazed over the boy's face. He was starting to secretly feel guilty and irresponsible for not giving Feng Ming a few days notice. However, given this situation it was a perfect opportunity to toughen the Prince, so he could stand on his own.

Without any better alternative, Rong Tian roughly reached for the hands attached to him and fiercely tugged them off his sleeves.

The abrupt action startled Feng Ming, as well as when the Regent King suddenly bowed and announced as loud as he could bellow out:

-“His Highness has arrived!”

Rong Tian immediately made scarce, stepping back to stand well behind Feng Ming, leaving the stunned fish standing all alone at the grand entrance to the open court.

Suddenly, the court doors slammed wide open, all the officials have been waiting early and eagerly for the Prince’s leadership.

They were aligned neatly and all the men simultaneously bowed welcoming their Crowned Prince:
- “Your Highness!”

Feng Ming gritted his teeth, muttered his hatred for a certain Regent King under his breath. All he really wanted to do right now was to turn around, grab the man and give him a good pounding. However, he knew this was an inappropriate time as for the time being he had to stick out his chest and take charge with his own two hands.

It was time to show his prowess, the blood and sweat he invested in learning practically everything needed to be showcased today. This included speaking in a dignified calm and collected manner which he had engrained into his mind.

-“All ministers and officials may rise. Please accompany me to pay the Empress our respects.”

The past two months of training by Rong Tian appeared to be fruitful for now. The words that left Feng Ming's lips were stern and authoritative, as expected of a leader.

His subjects answered in unison:

- "Yes, Your Highness."

Feng Ming raised his head, prompt out his chest and advanced towards the Empress's Palace quarters.

His large brown eyes flickered around with the sight that surrounded him. The inner Palace was brilliantly designed, beautiful and tranquil, a spacious boulevard lead to a grand hall that sat within the middle of the Empress's Palace walls.

The Empress was obviously waiting for her visitors.

Considering the solemn and serious atmosphere and the crowd of respected Xi Rei's officials that followed him, Feng Ming couldn't help to feel like a total fool.

God!

Was I actually going to see this through, pretending to be the Prince of this ancient country?

Even daring to even prance around in front of "my" mother to congratulate her on her birthday?

Rong Wang sensed the Prince falling into a daze which was clear as day on the young man's face. Such manner was inappropriate so the Regent King immediately strode over to the boy and whispered:

-“Your Highness, please proceed to the main hall to give your well wishes to the Empress.”

Rong Tian's low voice startled Feng Ming. His shock was short lived as he remembered the cruel prank the man played on him by pushing him out alone without any conscience. He gave the Regent King a good glare before straightening the heavy gold crown that rested on his head and he proudly advance without regrets.

Unafraid he marched dignified to the end of the boulevard and entered the main hall of the Inner Palace. Upon his arrival Feng Ming was graced with the sight of a young married woman dressed in exquisite attire situated in the middle of the room. This woman was surrounded by countless Palace maids.

Although she wasn't as outrageously attractive as Feng Ming had initially expected her to be, the woman carried an air of refined grace and nobility.

-“An He wishes the best to mother on your birthday!”

Complying with Rong Wang's teachings, after he heartily made his announcement, he knelt down and bowed slightly to show his respects to his mother.

As he attempted to carry himself with a degree of refinement his thoughts were secretly damning the chance of any mistakes.

This is the Empress! The mother of the Prince I'm impersonating!

If she discovers me to be an impostor, I promise you it will not be any fun!

With this in mind, he was more worried that Rong Tian would provoke him to make a mistake. With this thought in mind he couldn't refrain from trying to shoot a glare at the said Regent King who was meant to be behind him.

As he couldn't see the man out of his peripheral vision, Feng Ming bowed his head downwards and tilted it slightly to the side, only to discover the troublesome man was nowhere in sight.

In fact, the Prince found himself alone. He was the only one who had entered the hall and knelt down before the Empress. His entourage instead of following him inside had situated outside into their neat files, all were down on their knees outside of the Empress's hall!

Feng Ming had been so engrossed with determination and focus on his performance, when Rong Wang had stopped the procession just outside the hall's entrance he had shot through and continued to march on solo completely unaware of his fault.

A sudden cold sweat broke.

Rong Wang you bastard! You tricked me again!

Feng Ming fumed with anger between his gritted teeth.

Breaking the awkward silence, a soft voice heralded above his head:

-“My child, you may stand.”

-“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Feng Ming stood up and raised his head hoping to get a proper glimpse of the Empress only to discover that the other was doing the same.

With their eye contact, Feng Ming immediately averted his gaze, feeling guilt well up inside. He dared not to speak, his heart was thumping restlessly and his mind was just as overactive. He was uneasy and frankly scared of the Empress and whether she would pick up on any clues of his coy act.

It seems like if he started to make small talk he might just get away with it. Unfortunately, Feng Ming was tongue tied from fear, just in case his big mouth leaked a tell-tale sign of his origins he decided it was best to stand awkward and keep his lips sealed in front of his mother.

Luckily, the Empress appeared to not have much attachment with this son, so when she started to break the silence, the topic of her talk was quite broad.

-“How has my child been lately?”

Feng Ming was secretly amazed, given the Palace custom. These people would have rarely seen each other. Nonetheless, they were mother and child, why was there no excitement in her eyes?

He nodded and replied dutifully:

-“An He is in good health.”

Rong Tian’s voice boomed down his memory lane about “Etiquette” and he quickly added:

-“Thank you, Your Majesty for your concern.”

-“Have you been studying?”

It felt like a routine question, that wanted a routine answer and her voice was detached and cold.

-“My studies have been good.”

The Empress continued with several textbook questions and then finally said:

- “Your father is ill and incapable of governing the Kingdom. Ensure you seek advice and guidance from Rong Wang. It is for the best.”

Seek Rong Wang for advice and guidance?

That's the "best" plan to lead Xi Rei into complete and irreversible destruction!

Luckily for Xi Rei, I have aligned myself with this Cao Cao and I intend to make Rong Tian a hero through the ages.

At this time Feng Ming felt an urge to flock to the Empress's feet and cry and complain about his mistreatment and tell her all the bad things Rong Tian has done to him.

However, studying the Empress, he shook his head secretly and resigned the idea. From her ice cold gaze and complete indifference to this Prince, it was evident Feng Ming wasn't going to squeeze an ounce of pity from the stern woman.

Trying to side with this type of woman would doom Xi Rei, Feng Ming was better off trying to expand the country's prospects by aligning with Rong Wang.

He bowed his head again and answered obediently:

-“Yes, An He understands that he must seek Rong Wang’s advice and guidance on all matters, and not make his own initiative on decisions that need to be made.”

The Empress’s expression changed slightly, one could possibly claim there was a hint of a smile as she nodded her head.

-“That’s the right way. Where is Rong Wang? Send him in for me to see him.”

What is there to see? Feng Ming muttered bitterly inside.

Advised of his summon, Rong Tian immediately made his presence into the Empress’s hall. His stride was confident as he made his way in front of the Empress and he bowed deeply.

-“Your humble servant, Rong Tian is here to pay respects to Your Majesty. I wish you a blissful life for eternity.”

The demeanour he was carrying out was certainly at another level than Feng Ming. The elegant body language the smooth gestures and the expression his handsome face was making were completely out of the ordinary.

This was his act!

-“Good, that is all well. It has been a year since I’ve last seen you. I have heard that you have dealt with many affairs abroad and they have all been successful. You should be properly rewarded.”

A smile tore through the ice mask and it was bloody brilliant. Feng Ming could barely keep his jaw shut but he managed to show the shock in his saucer wide eyes.

Who exactly was her son again?

The Empress continued her tender words with the Regent King:

-“Rong Wang, the gifts that the officials have brought for me today, although you are mature you are still quite young and I’m afraid I am beyond the age of being able to enjoy their worth. I shall give them all to you, enjoy them slowly.”

Rong Wang smiled and replied graciously:

-“Thank you, Your Majesty for your generous reward. Rong Tian will only select one or two, so to be reminded of Your Highness’s grace and kindness.”

The gifts that were sent from the Nobles, officials and Court members had been readily stacked into a pile within the Empress’s main hall. Rong Tian darted over and paused for a short while before quickly selecting two items and returned to allow the Empress to inspect what was taken.

The Empress nodded, sighed and reluctantly announced:

-“The time has come, and you all must leave. I will take my rest.”

-“Yes!”

Feng Ming let out a big sigh of relief, as he in unison with Rong Tian made their final salutations to the Queen before their departure.

As they made their way out, Feng Ming suddenly heard the Empress call out to them.

-“Wait a minute...” She beckoned.

Both men abruptly halted in their steps and returned to her audience. They waited in spot for a while before the Empress ordered to her maid servants:

- “Retrieve that mink cloak and I bestow it to Rong Wang.”

The servant girls hurried and collected the mass of heavy fur from the pile of presents and handed to the Regent King, who respectfully held out both hands to receive the parting gift.

The Empress stared at Rong Tian for a moment and said with much concern in her voice:

-“Rong Wang you deal with Xi Rei’s matters endlessly, even overnight. The winter nights are bitter cold. It is better you stay warm.”

-“Thanks for Your Highness’s thoughtful gift.”

The pair finally left the main hall and together with the officials they retreated away from the Inner Palace.

-“That was strange the Empress treated you particularly well. It is as if you are her real son...”

When they returned to the Prince’s chambers Feng Ming was more than happy to strip the heavy ornamental cloak he had to wear for the day. His eyes studied Rong Tian suspiciously.

-“Don’t give me any nonsense. Your status is different than mine. You shouldn’t let others know what happened.”

-“Are you trying to threaten me again? The things you forced me to do today! I haven’t even settled that with you yet!” Feng Ming pouted.

-“I am her son, why did she give me nothing, and yet you are rewarded with this and that?”

-“That’s because I am the head of state, the Regent King” Rong Wang chuckled.

He unfolded the beautiful mink coat that was bestowed to him, swiftly wrapping it around Feng Ming and bundled the young man tightly within the folds of the warm heavy material.

He softly whispered to the disgruntled Prince:
-“What was rewarded to me doesn’t mean it can’t be rewarded to you as well?”

Rong Tian reached into his pockets to produce the two items he had selected from the Empress’s loot, waving them in front of Feng Ming’s eyes.

It was a beautifully made small mirror decorated with fine detailed painting and the other was a modestly crafted small sheathed dagger.

Feng Ming’s eyes practically lit up when he saw the knife. He was very interested and very surprised and he shouted out in glee. His hand darted to snatch the small knife and he quickly drew it out of its sheath. The blade was cold, sharp and deadly. Just playing with the knife and holding such a dangerous weapon in his hands made Feng Ming shiver.

-“This knife is amazing!”

-“This knife has a long history and it is prized as a treasure of Xi Rei. You better keep it along side you just in case you run into any problems. From my point of view, as it is selected from the Empress’s gifts it has to be authentic.”

Feng Ming didn’t give the dagger a second thought, but gratefully tucked it into his waist. He raised his eyebrow curiously at the second item that Rong Tian picked.

-“I don’t see a use in picking the mirror... Oh right! Given your looks, you must be infatuated with your reflection... I bet you stare at yourself in a mirror heaps, am I right?”

-“You are wrong again. This mirror is for you.”

-“It’s for me?”

Rong Wang lifted the mirror, and triumphantly pointed out with a smug voice:

-“Don’t tell me you haven’t realized that this handle is made out of pure gold? It’s even thin, very smooth and most suitable for you to use on your body *somewhere*. I will assist in training that part of you to open up slowly so I don’t have to worry about hurting you.”

Feng Ming blinked and blinked again in utter disbelief then he caught sight of the evil grin that was painted on Rong Wang’s lips and he finally understood the situation.

He immediately jumped back, drew the dagger from his waist, with his eyes widened, he hollered a warning:

-“Rong Tian, don’t you dare!”

-“Why wouldn’t I dare?”

The Regent King paid no heed to the small untrained creature that was waving the present he gave at him and without any fear he swiftly moved forwards.

-“Don’t come over here!” The Prince threatened.

-“Your Royal Highness, that is not how you wield a knife.”

The Regent King laughed as he clicked his tongue:

-“Gee, it looks like you haven’t been studying well in martial arts.”

-“You bastard! Go away! Get out! ...”

Feng Ming tried to avoid the man as he suddenly lunged forwards.

-“Argh! Let me go! Give my knife back! You said it was for me!” He screamed.

“However, to help you loosen down there is nothing to be scared about. I’ll take extra care not to hurt you...”

-“Help!”

- “Ahhhhhhhhh!!” Feng Ming choked as his predator was closing in for the kill.

-“Come save me! Someone save me!...”

Upon hearing Feng Ming's blood-curdling screeches, the experienced staff of the Prince's quarters inclusive of the maids and guards had quickly called it a day.

They all made their way out without a trace, making sure to close the doors tightly shut behind them.

It appears that Xi Rei Kingdom's true King was completely in control.

Chapter Fourteen

Finally the matter of the Queen's birthday was behind Feng Ming and one could consider that he had passed his first exam. His success promptly reflected the fruitful triumph of the two assiduous months he lived under the guide of the Regent King.

It was a good result.

As an award to commend the young man's efforts, Rong Tian permitted Feng Ming to ride White Cloud solo for one whole day. However, this was in consideration that horse riding was also a necessary skill the "stranger" had to study.

Come the day of the anticipated horse ride, Rong Tian was concerned over White Cloud's unsettling temper, as the steed refused to allow anyone else but his Master to mount him. As a result, the Regent King retracted his offer and did not allow Feng Ming to even come an inch closer to the great animal.

This completely shattered the young man, as he spent hours fuming and issuing Rong Tian the dirtiest look of discontent.

With the turn of events and their plan in turmoil, Rong Wang immediately shifted all official Xi Rei meetings to be undertaken two days earlier, a move to purposely allow them to have a break soon after.

The Regent King made another deal promising to take Feng Ming on White Cloud for a ride outside of the Imperial Palace and indeed it was Rong Tian's ploy to regain Feng Ming's waning favour.

-“Are you for real?”

Feng Ming's wide eyes shining with glee was hardly concealing his delight, there was still doubt sitting in his mind so he nervously grabbed the Regent King's collar.

-“We will go out of the Palace? And I get to ride on White Cloud? You'll let me ride alone?”

-“I will ride beside you and watch you closely”
Rong Tian confirmed.

-“That's great!”

Feng Ming's beautiful handsome face shared the same excitement seen on a child unwrapping a present. He couldn't hold back his joy, as he tackled the Regent King with a French-like greeting, a warm hug and quickly planted two loud kisses on Rong Wang's face.

-“However...” Rong Tian interjected after the young man’s elation calmed.

- “Tomorrow, before we leave the Palace, you must accompany me to meet someone.”

Feng Ming’s intuition flared, sensing some type of conspiracy spiralling around him.

He asked suspiciously:

- “Who is it?”

-“Your father, the King of Xi Rei, An Jiang.”

-“WHAT!?” Feng Ming exclaimed with a hint of fear in his voice.

-“It was only a few days ago you came out of the blue and drag me off to meet the Queen. Now you want me to meet the King? Hey, people have something called stress and tolerance and I’m going to hit that limit do you understand?”

Of course the Regent King could never comprehend how “stressful” it was to assume the identity of another human!

Instead of providing any sympathy the man chuckled at the boy’s reaction:

-“Don’t be afraid, the King has been deep asleep for years, as his son, you should pay him a visit him.”

Just pay him a visit?

It was obvious the Original Prince would have not often visited his own parents. Xi Rei's family system is so strange, how could the relationship between parents and children actually feel so unfamiliar, alike to complete strangers? Perhaps this was a downfall of the lack of "human interaction" within the Imperial Palace?

Feng Ming lifted his gaze onto the Regent King's stern face, knowing although the man was smiling through his teeth, what came out of the man's mouth was a complete order.

Even if he continued to argue, it was always pointless, worst, he could lose his privilege of riding the dazzling White Cloud outside of the Palace.

His best response was to bare it and nod before uttering bitterly:

-“I'll go then to come across this reincarnation of Cao Cao is my own bad luck.”

Feng Ming had exposed his immature side, a part that never cease to amuse Rong Tian. Although he was gifted with an exceptionally attractive appearance he wasn't someone you could find in the Royal family.

There was no one that could compare with the nobility of his appearance and the intelligence he held. This blend of assets made him a form of amazing beauty which held a fresh and pure atmosphere.

Rong Wang's eyes were deeply fixated on the young man, falling deeper into the vortex of Feng Ming's allure. The more he saw the more he loved. His strong arms brought the slender waist closer and tighter within his hold.

With a seductive voice, the Regent King whispered:

-“I only want you to become aware of your current situation earlier, to avoid any disasters in your path in the future.”

Then he released a deep sigh:

-“How I've wish if you weren't the Crowned Prince...”

Feng Ming's heart overflowed with the sweet sap oozing from the Regent King's words. It even made him blush before lightly scolding the smooth talker.

-“Don't bother sweet talking me. I've promised you I will definitely go tomorrow. He is only a vegetable.”

The two of them caught each other's gaze, sharing the same thought pattern. Their hearts were in a flurry and their faces reddened with each passing moment.

Rong Wang was the first to succumb to the lustre of Feng Ming's compelling charms. He suddenly smothered the younger man's mouth with a long kiss, and his hands began to caress the man's slender form.

Feng Ming had now become used to the Regent King's hasty greedy kisses which he reciprocated with his own, showing the older man that he wasn't submitting.

The atmosphere between the two heated up into overdrive...

-“Today I must...”

Their breathing was laboured and coarse, as both of them struggled for air supply. Rong Tian's voice was even deeper than normal and it was muffled by the soft pair of lips.

Feng Ming's mind was hectic and he was mesmerized by the man's touch as if it left a trail of desire, leading him into an elated daze as he could only instinctively clutch at the Regent King's clothing for support. The Prince's face was painted with a spoilt expression.

When the Regent King's slender fingers managed to unravel the holdings of Feng Ming's outer robes, Feng Ming immediately followed suite, copying Rong Wang's action and moved his hands to fiddle and undress the older man.

Given such a heated situation, where wanton feelings were practically seeping out there was a sense of urgency, a desperate need for skin on skin contact between the two men.

At a glance, it was apparent that Feng Ming had a stronger urge as he basically peeled the outer robe off his playmate with so much haste there was no delicacy involved!

-“There’s no need to hurry. We have the whole night.”

Why run before you can walk? In the end the Regent King could give Feng Ming a run for his money on who was faster at disrobing. The older man finished stripping Feng Ming clean to reveal the delicate flesh of the younger man’s beautiful body.

Feng Ming’s hands were clumsy as they struggled to undo the intricate clothing under-robe that the Regent King adorned. Rong Wang’s large hands moved the boy’s fumbling disaster away from the challenge and quickly helped speed up the process as he continued to undress himself.

It wasn’t long till a grin was painted wide across the Regent King’s face as he stood triumphantly in front of Feng Ming, proudly showcasing his healthy well toned naked body.

-“Do you like it?”

He smiled as he moved Feng Ming’s hands so they rested on the smooth muscles of his chest. These eyes welled with tenderness.

Feng Ming fondled the warm skin under his palms admiringly. Large black eyes wide filled with amusement as they treasured the sight before him.

-“How beautiful...” Feng Ming gently gasped in praise.

In the Regent King’s eyes, the real beauty in this room was the naked Feng Ming standing in front of him. With a swift movement, he motioned to sweep the young man off his feet and carried him over, placing him in the centre of the bed.

-“This time we aren’t going to use my hand or my mouth. I’m telling you in advance, so don’t say that I bullied you.”

Feng Ming was already spellbound, his soul was off with the fairies and he was paying no attention to the Regent King words.

All he wanted to do was to feel the other. He sat up and reached for the older man, instead he found himself being gently pushed back down onto the bed.

-“Lie down, the time we have during the evening is very valuable, we should cherish it.”

Although Feng Ming was dazed his managed to offer the correct “idiom” and murmuring to Rong Wang:

-“Stupid, it’s called “Every moment of a lover’s tryst is precious.”

Rong Tian was startled by the boy's comment. He laughed as he repeated patronizing the Prince:

-“Every moment of a lover's tryst is precious”. Well said.”

Rong Tian's large hands made way to Feng Ming's thighs, gradually coercing them to part, and he shuffled to make his way between them.

Feng Ming's felt cold as he his most secret parts was exposed. He let out a small sound that sounded like a whimpering animal.

Rong Wang softly assured the boy:

-“Don't be afraid. I'll make sure to pleasure you first and moisten you.”

With this, his hands reached to caress Feng Ming's rear entrance then his head dipped down and his mouth wrapped around the semi erect member.

The heat that radiated from Rong Tian's mouth sent Feng Ming shouting in excitement. There was no restraint left in Feng Ming's voice when the Regent King's tongue teased the tender tissue on the tip. Then his head bobbed up and down engulfing the sensitive flesh into his wet warm cavity.

-“Rong Tian... No... Nnh...” Feng Ming short pants of incoherent words amounted to nothing. His naked snow-white body twisted with each motion on top of the rich silk sheets.

Chapter Fifteen

-“No more?”

The Regent King’s sultry voice mocked his lover. His lips remained suctioned tightly over the Prince’s hardened muscle. As Feng Ming was reaching the point of his climax, Rong Tian suddenly abandoned the aching organ cruelly leaving him at a plateau.

Instead of heeding Feng Ming’s soft pleas, Rong Tian turned his attention to the trembling fevered body. His breath ghosted along the surface of Feng Ming’s inner thighs where he proceeded to lightly kiss, repeating this step until he trailed over the boy’s soft abdomen.

Feng Ming’s orgasm was just a spasm away from erupting under Rong Tian’s tentative care. However, now that the Regent King’s mouth was occupied elsewhere, the blood that had rushed forth into Feng Ming’s most important organ was begging with a painful swell,

waiting for the next surge to send it overboard. The deprivation during his peak was harsh and unbearable.

-“Nnnhh... No...” Feng Ming immediately whimpered in protest.

He twisted his body in agitation, beckoning the Regent King to fulfil its wishes.

-“Oh...”

Rong Tian chuckled, his lips stretched with a smile when he quickly blocked off a frustrated kick that an angry Feng Ming had issued towards him.

Instead of hitting his intended target, Feng Ming found his ankle easily caught by the man’s large hand. Rong Tian left him no time to react, his remaining hand braced Feng Ming’s other ankle. Having full control of the younger man’s legs he stretched them apart, completely exposing his lower body.

With this so much charming sight before him, how could a normal person resist this appetizing meal?

Homosexuality customs between nobility was not a rarity. In fact it is highly enjoyed. As the most privileged are able to sample an exquisite palette of bed partners given their wealth and power, no one was out of reach.

Rong Tian didn’t want to stall a moment longer, as he positioned himself between Feng Ming’s

outstretched legs, his own organ begged for action. He leaned forwards, pressing the tip of his thick circumference into the tight folds of supple skin.

Feng Ming grimaced at the intrusion. Rong Wang continued to part the entrance, gently sliding his length little by little in an unhurried manner until he was finally buried within the Prince.

-“Ahhh...”

The sensation of the large foreign object that filled his body that had initially startled Feng Ming now left him trembling.

Rong Tian maintained calmness in his coarse voice as he whispered:

- “It will be alright in a moment, don’t be afraid.”

Although assuring words left this mouth, for Rong Tian pausing midway was never on his agenda.

Instead he was fully prepared to advance his coupling with Feng Ming and to finally seek his glory, all starting with a powerful thrust.

In a blink of an eye, the uncomfortable feeling of being stretched out to his whims converted to an indescribable painful sting, which shook Feng Ming’s core.

The thrill of his pleasure disappeared without a trace, for Feng Ming who whole-heartedly intended to

obediently submit to the Regent King, instantly struggled underneath the man.

-“Don’t! It hurts... It hurts!!” He screamed shaking his head sideways like a rattle. His beautiful face was contorted with agony and his complexion grew paler by each grinding second.

To have the Regent King surrender at this stage was cruel.

As much as he could, Rong Tian kept the distraught young man pinned down beneath him, coaxing the boy with patience:

-“It will always hurt in the beginning Feng Ming... You don’t need to be scared.”

Planning to leave Feng Ming sexually satisfied there was no more hesitation from Rong Tian who marched forth. The larger man mercilessly rammed his manhood into the slender frame that shook uncontrollably with each thrust.

With the Regent King’s next impact, Feng Ming shot up from the bed and his hands outstretched to clench the bed sheets.

-“Ahhhh!!”

-“Nnhhh...!!”

-“Nnnnhhh...”

Feng Ming's carnal blood curdling screams echoed into the Prince's hallways.

Rong Wang was interrupted by the sound that was similar to silk material being ripped and it wasn't a pleasant noise. Concern washed over his mind and with haste he withdrew.

Pulling his thickness out from Feng Ming's tight passage, bowing his head down, his eyes widened when he discovered that he was covered in the tint of warm red blood.

This hit him by surprise given the time he had invested in training Feng Ming's body to relax and the amount of foreplay he practiced.

In the end Feng Ming's body was not ready and it could not bear the full force of Rong Tian's endowment.

A wave of remorse washed over the Regent King:
-“I'm to blame.”

Rong Wang's own face paled, in a flurry he brought the young man into his embrace. Checking again the condition Feng Ming's injuries, the blood flow had not ceased. Now the Prince's warm deep red blood was spreading across the silk sheets.

Refusing to release his hold on the Prince, Rong Tian shot his hand out towards the bedside stand searching for anything that could help in this emergency.

Fortunately, the original Prince would often get injured and ointments and medical pills were always nearby. The treatments available to the Imperial family were the best cures for ailments you could find across the whole realm.

Fumbling around Rong Tian located a vial of ointment, which he used to delicately tend to Feng Ming's heavy bleeding.

-“It hurts...”

Feng Ming's handsome brow tightened and occasionally a hiss of pain would escape his pursed lips as he was treated.

The wrenching noises that left his whitened lips only escalated in more worry and guilt for the Regent King. Witnessing how his lover could break into a cold sweat from the pain he caused left Rong Tian distressed.

Finally he finished tending his patient and he discarded the ointment so he could draw Feng Ming into his arms again.

The two figures laid down to rest, sweet talking to each other into slumber.

-“Does it still hurt?”

-“Mmm...” Feng Ming managed a groan.

-“I’ve ended up injuring you.” The Regent King replied coldly.

Feng Ming was feeling reasonable so he offered Rong Tian a weary smile.

- “Rest assured... You told me in advance didn’t you? So I won’t say that you bullied me...”

Upon hearing this line Rong Wang was given a little peace of mind, at least the young man’s wit was intact.

-“You are injured and temporarily won’t be able to ride a horse. That means tomorrow we will have to postpone your ride. When you get better, I’ll permit you to ride.”

-“No way! I want to ride. You promised me and you’ll get fat if you eat one’s word! ✱”

Turning in Rong Tian’s embrace, Feng Ming shifted around to thread his own arms around the Regent King’s form, drawing him closer. This motion was a trap.

Rong Tian easily a victim as he fell for as it when the warm small body next to him tugged at his heart’s string.

-“Alright, I promise. However, you must let me hold you whilst we ride White Cloud.” He compromised.

Then he asked:

- “What do you mean by that “I’ll get fat by eating one’s word”?”

- “Well, that’s a classical saying...”

Receiving Rong Tian’s commitment made Feng Ming happy, so he didn’t mind explaining and showing off to the Regent King about advance literal sayings from the future.

The endless night concluded as the early hours of the new day, the two finally drifted into slumber with their bodies cuddled together.

Chapter Sixteen

It surely wasn't the first time that Feng Ming found himself awakening within the crook of Rong Wang's sturdy arm.

Yet this time he had to face the consequences of last night's activities. Recollection of memories overwhelmed him and his face burned like blazing embers as he couldn't hold back his embarrassment.

He kept his movements low keyed, slowly cracking his eyes open just enough to peek at the Regent King. Rong Tian's handsome features were in full view and luckily he appeared still in the spell of sleep.

Feng Ming had the urge to get up and changed. Unfortunately, before he could attempt a getaway by slipping secretly out of the bed, he had a problem to deal with. That was the task of removing the Regent King's possessive arm off his waist. As he motioned to displace

the weight for his freedom, a familiar low and husky voice, sweetly greeted him in his ear.

-“Does it still hurt? Dawn is just breaking in, don’t flail about too much.”

Feng Ming looked genuinely stunned:

- “You were already awake?”

Not satisfied that he was potentially monitored by Rong Tian, Feng Ming shot him a fiery expression.

-“Did you wake up early so you could tease me?”

-“I woke up when you moved” Rong Wang pointed out.

-“Only a dead person wouldn’t feel you stirring within their arms.”

Usually Rong Tian behaved seriously and he would conduct himself maturely. Nonetheless the ever growing moments he shared with Feng Ming tearing down the tough exterior. He was able to keep his poker face whilst he was in a playful mood towards the Prince.

Feng Ming chuckled at Rong Tian’s reasoning before serving him a piece of his mind. He delivered a hearty kick under the heavy silk quilt they shared.

To his own surprised, the moment he recoiled his leg back from the assault, a sharp bite of pain shot from

his backside. He winced at the unpleasant sensation that had been caused by aggravating his wound.

Rong Wang paled in concern for the Prince's wellbeing.

- "What happened? Does it still hurt?" He leaned over, studying Feng Ming's whitened complexion that was withered with pain.

With reproach he whispered:

- "I did warn you not to move about."

Not delaying the issue any longer Rong Tian decided to take it into his own hands. He whipped the heavy silk covers off from Feng Ming before positioning himself between the Prince's legs. His large hands firmly parted the boy's thighs for an inspection.

Flustered and helpless Feng Ming shouted his objections:

- "No, don't look!"

Within a flash, Feng Ming shot up and retreated to one side of the bed before Rong Tian could catch a hold of him.

- "It's nothing. Really you don't have to check."

Seeing how Feng Ming was hell bent on refusing him and that forcing him to cooperate could lead to more damage, Rong Tian let go of the subject and finally offered his submission.

-“Alright, I won’t take a look as you wanted.”

He left the warmth of the bed pallet and proceeded to dress himself. His departure allowed Feng Ming to calm down and adjust himself back on the bed, which became his vantage point, where he could keep his large brown doe eyes glued on the Regent King.

-“Hey, take off those clothes again” He suddenly requested.

Feng Ming had snuggled himself back onto the bed. He was positioned with one hand lifting up his cheek.

-“I want to watch you again.”

The outburst served to amuse the Regent King, who had just tediously finished dressing the outer layer of his intricate heavy and elegant outfit.

He smirked:

- “What? Are you inviting me?”

Feng Ming gave him reserved look.

-“I liked the snap shot images I could get of you changing your clothes. Oh that’s right!! You don’t know what a camera is.” He sighed.

-“Talking to Ancients is really difficult sometimes. I can’t communicate using modern words.”

Waving his attention from the confused Rong Tian, Feng Ming wrapped himself tightly within the warm quilts, shifting himself until his head rested at an awkward angle on the bed's headboard.

-“I wanted to see you get dress again.” He pouted.

Feng Ming was getting ahead of himself even audaciously making requests. Unfortunately, Rong Tian was not in the mood to complete Feng Ming's whimsical request.

-“Aren't you getting up? If it gets any later, I won't take you out to ride White Cloud.”

With just those few words the Regent King lured Feng Ming to leave confines of the cosy blankets in a matter of seconds.

The Prince's eyes had lit up by simply thinking about the arrangements he had today. He was especially excited and now he couldn't care less that he was denied the joys of admiring Rong Tian's physical charms.

A slender hand shot out from beneath the warmth, reaching for his under robe. He drew the garment under the quilt where he shuffled around dress himself. As he conducted himself in such a hasty manner, it was inevitable that he had accidentally pulled at his injuries.

Feng Ming's face immediately twisted in discomfort and his eyes watered.

-“Do you need a hand?”

Rong Tian had been watching closely with a smile.

-“There's no need!” Retorted Feng Ming who was now determined to keep what was left of his pride.

-“There's no need to be so thin skinned. Nowadays homosexuality is a widely accepted customs throughout the country. There's no need to be shy about such matters. This won't be appropriate, especially if you remain bashful on this topic outside of the Palace.”

-“Why would it be an issue?”

-“His Royal Highness, the Crowned Prince would be expected to live a life filled with many sexual liaison within the Imperial Palace. Thus being shy to such aspects of Palace life would surely incite suspicion of character, correct?”

By this stage Feng Ming was at least clothed in his plain undercoat and he finally left the sheets. Now he was being doted on by the Regent King, as the older man stood next to him and assisted in fixing a white belt around his small waist. He then proceeded to help him into the plentiful layers of his eloquent outfit.

Continuing the topic of “love liaisons” it suddenly struck Feng Ming:

- “Wasn’t An He not compatible with you in bed? So how could he not be embarrassed about a same sex relationship? Furthermore, wasn’t he timid and weak by nature? Rong Tian don’t you dare coax me into doing things by using the Prince’s name and “reputation” to threaten me!”

Rong Wang chuckled at how bright this “Prince” was.

-“Oh, An He was honest with me however in the presence of others he had another persona. Naturally, when I bullied him, he carried his wrath out on other people. Well, after all he was the Crowned Prince and he could do whatever he wanted.”

-“Are you implying that he... And other men... He did...”

Feng Ming was finding it hard to swallow and he feared the answer.

-“As time passes by within the Imperial Palace, it is certain that one would entertain themselves, using and abusing their authority.”

-“Who was it with?” Feng Ming asked desperately.

-“I never paid attention to who he shared his trysts with. Although based on An He’s ability I highly doubt

whether he was able to seduce anyone of high ranking or nobility. It is most likely he bullied the servants around him into submission to cater for his needs.”

The thought that there could be one or two servants around him that had once shared their bodies in intimacy, made Feng Ming’s stomach lurch and a layer of goose bumps formed over his skin.

-“Wasn’t An He yours? He sought lovers within your own territory, didn’t you get jealous?”

-“Whoever said he was mine? He was merely a plaything. When I am absent he had the freedom of doing whatever he wants.”

Rong Tian suddenly broke out a sinister laugh:

-“However you, you are mine, if you sought a lover in the Palace, I will be jealous. Actually I would be infuriated and jealous.”

-“Humph!” Feng Ming snorted as he stood nearby finally dressed.

-“We should leave quickly, just in case we miss the “deadline” and you break your promise.”

-“When have I broken my word?” Rong Wang asked, as he happily ushered Feng Ming out of the Prince’s chambers.

At this time the country was midway through a long winter, which last from late December to March.

The air was icy and dry. The sun peaked out and shone down onto the Palace, permeating warmth for a few good hours of the day.

Feng Ming was held in the Prince's quarters for a long period of time and on the occasion he would be permitted to step out of his perimeters he was always scuttled off by Rong Tian in a hurry.

Feng Ming was in terrible discomfort today, which was the result of strenuous bedtime activities.

Seeing the Prince was physically challenged today, the Regent King allowed a casual pace as they made their way around the Palace grounds.

The Regent King was unusually attentive and careful with Feng Ming as if he was made of porcelain. Rong Wang spontaneously took Feng Ming on a detour, so he could enlighten his lover with the majestic winter scenery of the Imperial Palace. On their new path, they bypassed the grandest Palace garden.

Xi Rei's Kingdom had a strange breed of flowers, which preferentially blossomed in full during winter. The bright colours of a fully opened bud was a completely contrast to the dull greyness of winter. Each flower was capable of growing into the size of a human palm. They were exceptionally beautiful.

Upon setting his eyes on the strange flowers that were in full bloom in the dead of winter, Feng Ming

stopped in his steps and pointed out towards the vast splashes of colour around him and exclaimed:

- “These flowers are breathtaking!”

Rong Wang approached the Prince, closing their distance until the warm stream of air from his nose was gently blowing on Feng Ming’s pink frosted cheeks.

He murmured to his lover:

- “Those are a speciality to Xi Rei. This breed of flower is called “Three Months of Spring”*. As this country’s Prince, how could you not even know?”

-“You’ve never taught me! How would I’ve known?” Feng Ming rebutted.

-“Haven’t I told you, if you come across something you don’t know or are unfamiliar with do not make a big scene. Instead stay quiet and I will naturally explain it to you later.”

-“Humph!”

Rong Wang studied Feng Ming’s face, and it was rather transparent that he wasn’t satisfied. Not paying heed, he ignored Feng Ming’s mistake and reached for the boy’s collar and drew the cloak collar together to seal in the warmth.

He bent down and intimately whispered:

-“When these flowers bloom they are a splendid sight, but if you greet them with this sour face of yours, you’ll make them heartbroken.”

Listening to Rong Tian’s concession, Feng Ming was bashful with the man’s way with words. He was still reluctant to admit any wrong doing, so he waved it off and said:

- “I’m not mad, just merely curious to why it has been given such a name considering they only open in winter. Why are they called “Three months of Spring”?”

Suddenly a strange and wicked smile stretched across Rong Tian’s lips. With a soft and mischievous voice he whispered into Feng Ming’s ear:

-“These flowers are capable of invigorating the one’s passion until they are bursting at the seams. The nomenclature refers to the actual “usage” and “effectiveness”. Dearest Crowned Prince, why else would they be planted so plentifully around the Imperial Concubine quarters?”

They were *that* type of flowers with *that* type of usage.

By the time Feng Ming had time fully digested what Rong Tian had explained to him, his face immediately lit up like a flaming match-stick.

Whilst they continued leisurely paced, the Prince had plucked a stem of this said flower and had been innocently twirling it in his hand. Upon realisation, Feng

Ming had quickly thrown the offensive “Three months of lust” at the Regent King’s chest.

In a disgusted voice he blatantly scolded the man:

-“I knew something was fishy... I wondered what purpose you had by taking a detour and you brought me here!”

Rong Tian defended:

- “You were the one that asked, why blame me? As the Prince, when you are unfamiliar on how to handle matters, you should be thoroughly reprimanded. Now come over here and I will punish you for not fulfilling our goals from last night, instead we shall conclude it here.”

Feng Ming froze on the spot.

Rong Wang had only meant it as a joke and found the Prince’s reaction priceless. He reached forth, taking Feng Ming’s hand into his own, so they could walk hand in hand to their next destination.

Along the way, Feng Ming was laughing, telling jokes and banters to amuse the Regent King. It was not long before they reached the perimeters of the Empress’s Palace.

Standing in the grand entrance of her gates, the unloved Prince could not help but feel unease as he recalled the lukewarm reception he had the last time. His

heart was reluctant to step forwards and ultimately he refused to place his foot forwards to enter any further.

The Regent King understood the Prince's mindset and discomfort thus he did his best to console the boy:

-“The Queen stays within the innermost chambers and rarely ventures out. We will only visit the King, as there's no need to see the Empress.”

Rong Wang boldly stepped forwards taking the lead by walking through the gate and to the side, prompting the Prince to follow in his footsteps. Finally Feng Ming took a gulp and gathered his nerves to cautiously follow.

Across their path numerous guards stood on watch, each man saluted and greeted their masters.

On the day of the Empress's Birthday, Feng Ming was pretty much herded back to the Prince's chambers after the initial greetings and short ceremony that followed. He barely had the chance to take a look around the second largest living quarter within the Imperial grounds. It was only natural that he would be curious, taking the opportunity to peek back and forth at his surroundings.

Gradually the path they took lead into a wide corridor where near the end they took a left turn through a small door, which connected into a smaller hallway that was equally as long.

Rong Tian continued his pace guiding Feng Ming. The couple continued to walk for a while. Again they made a turn, entering another narrow corridor, which appeared to host less traffic and guards. At the end, it was connected to a small corridor, which was immensely different to the rest of the Palace.

In contrast, the building design was less elegant and it was awfully peaceful. The hallway didn't feel inviting, it was tunnel-like, even though the sun was beaming down overhead where they were going to advance into had no windows. Instead this hallway depended on two rows of torch to illuminate the darkness.

-“Where is this place?”

Feng Ming suddenly felt very unsettled. He was still standing behind Rong Tian and with the sight presented before him and his legs were hesitant to march down the eerie hallway. He was soft spoken but his voice managed to echo down the narrow and confined corridor.

-“Don't make a fuss, just follow me.”

Both men remained silent, venturing deeper into the mysterious path. One lead and one followed obediently. After five to six minutes they finally halted.

They had reached the end of the corridor where a small door sat. The metal details on the door had long lost their metallic lustre by the aging of countless months

and years. The main highlight of the rustic relic was a large cast iron padlock which had turned slightly green from erosion.

Feng Ming's heart started to race as he couldn't refrain from associating this situation with the television shows about Ancient martial arts sects, where each usually held a dark and forbidden secret only the disciples were privileged to learn.

A shiver ran down his spine, as gloomy thoughts circled his mind.

It couldn't be that the King isn't in a coma and instead Rong Tian has imprisoned him in here!?

Over the past months he had gradually developed good feelings towards the Regent King, at least managing to get along. His impression of Rong Tian had progressively shifted to a positive light.

Regardless of their development, deep down inside Feng Ming knew a malevolent beast resided inside Rong Tian. He had witnessed it awaken several times when the Regent King handled matters. On occasion the man's resolve was vicious and merciless, driven not yield to others nor offer any kindness. It was possible that he would rebel against his superior and commit treason without a blink of his eyes.

The Prince's heart was hammering hard against his chest. There was a chance that this was the scheme of

treacherous officials conspiring to overthrow the current King, to seize the throne out of greed or discontent.

As he pondered over the possibilities, there were flaws which remained perplexing. Especially, why was Feng Ming brought here by Rong Tian?

Although he was speculating, the thought about being entangled into such terrible traitorous conspiracies within the Palace sent more chills over his body.

Their surrounding was smothered by a deadly silence and there was no trace of guard footprints or any disturbances on the dusty floor.

Rong Wang's face was determined. He reached into his bosom and drew out a key, steadily clicking the metal in place and turning it firmly to unlock the padlock. Removing the rusty metal, he pushed the heavy iron reinforced door open, revealing a steep and dark staircase.

A rush of cold wind blew up from the staircase and assaulted Feng Ming's senses. Even his mink cape couldn't prevent the chill from seeping in, the cold air were like tendrils lashing at them. The Prince shivered against the icy breeze.

-“Why are your hands so cold? This staircase will lead to is a secret chamber that is underground. There is a large harbour of ice, make sure you don't catch a cold.”

Rong Tian had turned around to face Feng Ming, grabbing hold of one of the boy's frost bitten hands he carefully lead him step by step down the stone stairway.

Eventually they reached the end of the stairwell and entered a completely different world. As if they walked into a fairy tale of a Crystal Palace made of ice. The temperature inside the cavity was beyond freezing but the beauty of the translucent ice walls gave a feeling of ethereal magic.

To Feng Ming's surprise he was now standing in a grand chamber constructed solely from ice. He spun around to face one of the many ice walls that divided the room and was shocked to see two rows of jars. It was pottery was used in Xi Rei to keep relics of the dead during funeral rites. These vessels were stacked neatly everywhere within the room.

The next object that made Feng Ming reel backwards was a glassy coffin that had been carved out of ice. The surface was embedded extravagantly with countless precious crystals and rocks. The casket was positioned in the middle of the icy room and there was a person lying inside.

Feng Ming swallowed and he moved closer to take a look.

His eyes set on a handsome looking individual, who was wearing the Royal clothing of Xi Rei. The man appeared young not a day over thirty.

It can't be! This is the King of Xi Rei?!

Sure enough as if Rong Tian had heard Feng Ming's inner thoughts, he suddenly knelt down beside the coffin and proceeded to bow three times.

As he stood up he confirmed the question in Feng Ming's mind:

-“He is the King of Xi Rei, your father.”

Feng Ming's eyes fixated on the cold dead corpse lying in front of him, his skin tingling from the news. He felt numbness swept over his body.

-“He was in a coma right? How is this...?”

The Regent King cut him off:

-“That is what is known and accepted by everyone outside. In truth the King had passed away many years ago.”

-“Who did it?” Spat Feng Ming as he nervously stared in disbelief at Rong Tian.

If An He's situation was the result of the cold blooded murder then it was just too cruel. Everything that had happened to the original Prince was all because someone wanted power and the throne. The downstream tragedy was that the Crowned Prince became a prisoner within his own Palace and a man's plaything.

His stomach was making knots in disgust.

-“I do not know who was responsible as the King’s death was extremely sudden. There was not even the slightest clue that could explain his death or a trace thereafter. On the morning of his death, the maids had routinely entered his bedchambers to wake and prepare him for his official duties. However, they found that the King had stopped breathing. Afterwards, we executed everyone that knew of his death, and then fabricated a story that the King was ill. A few days passed and we officially announced that the King had fallen into a mysterious incurable sleep. The power of the state was assigned to me and I govern as the Regent King.”

Seeing Feng Ming staring at him with a pale face the Regent King prompted:

-“Are you suspecting that I am the culprit?”

His guess was spot on, that was the doubt running through Feng Ming’s mind.

-“The King is dead, aren’t matters currently in your favour? If it wasn’t so, how else would you be able to monopolise the Imperial Court?” accused Feng Ming.

Rong Wang’s face remained emotionless and he stared blankly at Feng Ming before abruptly swinging his arm across to net the boy by the waist. Feng Ming was caught off guard by the Regent King’s sweeping motion, startling him to the point he froze over like the ice around

him. All he could do was look wide eyed into Rong Tian's face.

-“Don't be foolish, I've purposely of brought you here to inform you of this matter”

Rong Tian planted the corner of his lips onto Feng Ming's, kissing him deeply twice.

He gently continued:

- “Secrets within the Palace are vast and limitless, what I've exposed to you is the biggest kept secret in all of Xi Rei. The King passed away years ago and the suddenness of this death would have been a golden opportunity for an uprising within the Imperial Court. There are countless individuals within the ranks that are blood thirsty and crave the throne for their own. The death of the King was never announced and an excuse was used to conceal his passing.”

-“Was it really necessary?”

-“The Prince was but a child. He was unable to inherit the throne and succeed his father. The King has a younger brother, who is ambitious and would have jumped at the chance to claim his birth rights as the Crowned Prince to become the next King. To avoid having him surge into the Palace with soldiers we had no other choice but to conceal the King's death.”

-“Such a big matter and you've managed to maintain everyone in the dark?”

Rong Wang's lips eased into a soft smile, he gazed down at Feng Ming and lovingly whispered:

-“The matter depends on the individual.”

Inside Feng Ming could only compare the attitude and treatment the original Prince received. He was confused to how Rong Tian who treated him so harshly was so willing to risk so much for the original Prince's sake?

Standing huddled together in the wintry room, Rong Tian sweet and kind moment was in a hard to come by, Feng Ming knew better than anyone to say something to offend the man.

-“The Prince was in a dire circumstance as his fate lied with the destiny of Xi Rei and was constantly surrounded by conspiracy and danger. Since he was born he has been the target of several assassination attempts. For the sake of protecting the Prince so he can reach the day he could ascend the throne, the Empress and the most trusted Court official, Rong Wang✱, discussed and arranged for the Crowned Prince to be “exchanged” and raised externally.”

-“Huh?”

Feng Ming was shaken by what his head was trying to process.

-“Then An He...? That means the Crowned Prince within the Palace...”

-“Yes. He was a fake.”

-“So after all this, I am actually a fake?” Feng Ming then lit up with excitement.

-“Then who is the real Prince? ... Don’t tell me... It-it’s you?”

Rong Tian nodded in confirmation.

- “Yes, it’s me. I am the Prince that was smuggled from the Imperial Palace to live at Official Rong’s Estate. There I was raised sheltered from danger by living under an assumed identity as Rong Wang’s son. When I grew older my adopted father unfortunately passed away, so naturally I inherited his title and took over the matters of the Court.”

Feng Ming blinked his eyes in disbelief for a long time, before finally saying:

-“Anyway, that means you aren’t a Cao Cao, instead you are a raccoon! ❄”

He shook his head, conceding:

- “No wonder the Queen was indifferent and treated me so coldly, in contrast to you being fawned by her love.”

-“Feng Ming, the reason why I’ve told you my story today, is because you are in danger.”

-“Don’t try to frighten me again!”

Chills ran down his spine, he growled:

-“If you want me to return the title of your rightful heritage just ask me directly! Don’t scare me in such a creepy place! I am not a thief!”

Rong Tian didn’t budge, he was not joking.

-“I’ve received a message, and the message informed me that the secret surrounding the King’s death has been exposed. Previously they did not have significant definitive evidence to prove otherwise and we were able to smother any suspicions. We weren’t so fortunate this time as it appears our opposition has in their possession proper concrete evidence.”

-“So what?”

Then Feng Ming thought about it for a moment and it immediately struck him.

-“Oh, I know. Now that there are rumours spreading around Xi Rei, the King’s brother must be storming in to claim back the throne! That means Xi Rei will be in utter chaos.”

-“Yes.”

Rong Wang flashed him a praising smile which quickly shifted into a stern look.

-“This man’s name is An Xun. He had failed time and time again to win the title as the Crowned Prince in favour to his older brother. His forceful efforts were fruitless, so he left Xi Rei and married into the Royal family in the Country of Fan Jia. Now that there is an opening to seize what he has sought for so many years. It is only right to say it’s his opportunity of a life time which he will certainly not miss.”

-“Even if he returns, you are here to see over matters, there’s no need to fear him.” Feng Ming stated calmly.

-“An Xun has planted numerous spies within the Imperial Palace. I’ve caught and rooted out the majority of them. However, there remain countless enemies which have concealed themselves well. Even I have failed to detect them.”

He paused.

-“Feng Ming, think about it, if you wanted to seize the throne, what would be the most convenient solution?”

-“A solution?”

Feng Ming scratched his head then a spark lit up:

-“Kill the Crowned Prince?”

-“In your words precisely, even a child would use this method. That’s right, if the Prince was killed, then An Xun could use his authority and fairly overtake the throne. Even all the ministers and the Empress together would not be able to suppress his uprising. That’s because An Xun carries the Royal lineage in his blood and it is his birth right.”

-“But I’m not the Crowned Prince, you are the real one...”

-“In the past I never concerned myself if the “fake” Prince was to be murdered. He was sought to fill my role and live an existence of luxury, in the end he would have merely been my scapegoat. But you...”

Rong Tian took a deep breath, bracing Feng Ming tighter in his arms.

-“Did you know that recently someone had been tampering with your food and drinks?”

-“What?! ... I didn’t notice.”

-“I have already dealt with the problem however the servant that had been slowly poisoning you committed suicide. I never had the chance to interrogate her.”

Feeling Feng Ming’s heart racing so much it practically fell out from this chest made the Regent King laugh.

-“Don’t be afraid, I am here. No one will be able to harm you. However, the situation we have at hand is critical, you must exercise caution everywhere. For instance, in the garden today you made a small mistake. Make sure not to repeat it. When food, clothing and gifts are sent to you by others don’t just casually consume them. I’m more worried about your impulsive and naive behaviour. You are too easy to take advantage of.”

Feng Ming’s face soured.

-“How could being a Prince be more terrifying than living as 007 with all his enemies?”

-“Alright, well let’s end the conversation here. Behave yourself from now on and don’t stir trouble. Now let’s go horse riding.”

-“Great! Let’s go quickly!”

Just hearing the word horse had lightened Feng Ming’s mood. He was anxious to leave the strange and gloomy sanctuary. He took the lead and pulled Rong Tian in a hurry out of the room.

Chapter Seventeen

The two men rushed out of the Imperial Palace, galloping away into the fields.

Feng Ming's spirit was completely uplifted. There was no trace of the shadowy darkness, as he suppressed the unpleasant thoughts into the back of his mind.

Rong Wang's horsemanship was worthy of envy, as he held his lover with one hand, he maintained the reins with the other, speeding into and challenging the hurtling wind.

As cold gusts of wind lashed continuously, the pair remained carefree as the thrill was exhilarating experience.

Feng Ming head peeped out from under the cloak that the Regent King had tightly wrapped around him like a bundle. A large goofy grin was painted across his face as he released shouts and cheers.

Rong Tian reined in White Cloud to a halt. He swiftly dismounted and carefully carried the Prince back down to earth.

-“If Spring was here, this field would be filled with endless stretches of grass that appear to reach of the skies. Studded with countless flowers, a sight that is truly enchanting.” He glimmered, pointing to the vast and barren landscape in front of them.

-“Now it’s bare!”

Feng Ming didn’t spare the dried up empty land a second glance.

Rong Tian rarely had the luxury of venturing outside of the Palace on non-official business and here he was trying to create a romantic atmosphere aiming to move Feng Ming heart.

-“Yes, that’s true. However, it is the lonely cruel winter that makes us lament for warmth of spring’s prosperity. All living beings on earth live in a cycle don’t they?”

-“That’s right, that’s the amazing strength of life.”

Feng Ming secretly thought whether it was an appropriate time to flaunt his “talent” with words.

"Wildfires may strip the land of life, but once the spring wind blows the battlefields will flourish."

Those words weren't his and Feng Ming wasn't comfortable stealing someone else's words, so he had better forget about his display.

White Cloud had been nibbling at by a patch of dried grass he flicked his long tail and trotted slowly to his master seeking attention.

The prized pet was feeling displaced, jealous that Feng Ming had gained more importance than him. Oblivious to the animal's displeasure, Feng Ming felt a crazy attraction to the horse, the gravity of the force was stronger than any feelings he had for the Regent King. This was one dangerous love triangle.

Wanting to feel the sleekly length of White Cloud's tail, the Prince couldn't resist trying to catch it in his hand. White Cloud was the property of the Regent King who did nothing but spoil him. He was a proud animal and he shunned contact other than his master. His rejection to Feng Ming was evident as he responded by whipping his tail into the boy's face then turned back to offer a disgruntled neigh.

- "Be careful."

Rong Wang long anticipated that Feng Ming would do something to provoke his pet, as expected the repercussions of Feng Ming's action only served to give him a laugh.

When White Cloud whipped his tail at the Prince's face for round two, Rong Tian stepped between and separated the boy and the animal.

The fact that Feng Ming failed to grab hold of White Cloud's tail frustrated him, he glared at the beast angrily snapping:

- "He is looking down on me!"

- "Why did you go and provoke him? Horse's have a temper, besides White Cloud is the best horse in Xi Rei."

- "I'm being stared down at by a horse, it makes me angry!"

Feng Ming gritted his teeth, and reminded the Regent King:

- "I want to ride White Cloud and you promised me that I could take a long ride today."

Rong Wang raised an eyebrow.

- "You've injured yourself there last night are you still able to ride?"

Recalling his humiliating injury, Feng Ming grew even more enraged. He snatched Rong Tian's collar and threatened:

- "I want to ride and I will not give up until I do!"

The Regent King was caught up in the boy's demand, he had no other option than to raise his hands up and surrender:

-“Alright, I will ride a lap with you. Just around this mountain how does that sound?”

Feng Ming immediately jumped at the offer and Rong Wang mounted and lifted the Prince so this time he sat mounted front of him.

In fear of working up Feng Ming's injuries in this position, Rong Tian refused to let the horse bolt carelessly. Instead he had limited White Cloud to stroll.

Along the way as the pair passed landmarks the Regent King's guide and mentor role kicked in. The lovely scenery became the classroom as the Regent King taught his pupil geography and local conditions.

-“Over there lies Xi Rei River, the largest river in our country. The land which the river crosses is highly fertile and gives rise to the majority of our agricultural success.”

Feng Ming gazed into the distance, sure enough caught sight of a large body of water rushing and snaking through the landscape from the east. On either side were countless plots of cultivated land. Although it was winter hardworking peasants were still labouring away.

He didn't understand farming so after a few more glances he was disinterested. Instead he turned his attention to the high mountain ranges that were beyond

the farmlands which appeared to span far into the distance.

-“Look over there, there are so many peaks, those are more spectacular. When Spring arrives you have to take me to the mountains to play.”

-“All day long you only think about having fun. Next spring will be your eighteenth birthday do you know what that means?”

Spoiling the mood the Regent King was talking about politics again... Feng Ming immediately frowned and gave him a look.

-“What are you trying to imply?”

-“The Crowned Prince is eighteen therefore you can ascend the throne.”

-“I know at that time you want me to return your title, right?”

Feng Ming’s pitiful expression was entertaining. Rong Tian let out a chuckle before stroking Feng Ming’s back tenderly.

-“Feng Ming, next year Xi Rei’s chaotic fight for the throne will finally draw to a conclusion. Such a complicated matter will be settled, however, it won’t be without enormous difficulties ahead. For us to be able to survive till next March is a hard task.”

-“Please don’t speak of such depressing matters! Aren’t we out here to enjoy ourselves today? Even if you work hard you can’t neglect the joys of living and having fun. How about we set aside business and work on leisure?” The Prince protested.

Rong Wang lovingly stroked Feng Ming’s head in apology.

If given opportunity to meet both men at the same time, one may be surprised to hear that they were in fact roughly the same age. In comparison whenever you looked at Rong Tian, he always appeared to be old and wise as if he had matured years ahead of Feng Ming.

Feng Ming looked deeply into Rong Wang’s face and then suddenly thought of all that the Regent King had to endure in order to reach the stage he was at.

Growing up surrounded by feuds and conspiracies was an unhealthy environment. No wonder why the man was so stern and tense. How many secrets of his past were still hidden deep inside? Was he scarred from such a complicated childhood?

The more Feng Ming put his mind to it, the more he felt sorry. Rong Tian was like a modern day child that grew up from a dysfunctional family. The Prince decided to let this one slip.

With sympathy he purposely changed the subject:

- “Where was I up to?”

- “You just said that in spring you wanted to climb the mountains.”

- “That’s right. There are so many hillsides to be explored, I bet in spring it will be stunningly beautiful.” Feng Ming giggled.

Rong Wang let out a sigh:

- “Those Mountains are a pleasing view to the eyes from where we stand but in reality the terrain is not welcoming. Numerous mountain ranges make up the majority of Xi Rei’s land and unfortunately there isn’t much arable land left. Our yearly harvest is barely able to get us over a long winter. If there is a bad harvest, that year our people will face a famine and we will need to seek assistance from other countries paying a fortune for provisions.”

Feng Ming raised his head to look out into the distance sure enough there were only a limited area of flat plains on either side of the river. The mountains girded these plains and they were all covered with withering dead growth.

- “Sure it is mountainous but there’s still soil... Shouldn’t it be fertile? Why haven’t you taken advantage of the hills?”

-“The slopes are too steep. The plants aren’t able to receive enough regulated water, sunlight and nutrition. How can this land be used? Cultivating the hillside is inconvenient, what’s more is addressing the problem of irrigation. The water needed to sustain the crops would be much higher than what we use with the crops near the banks of the river.”

Casually Feng Ming replied:

-“You can transform the mountain. Oh! If you construct terraces* then your problem would be solved!”

-“Oh?”

The strange suggestion had the Regent King by the ear:

-“What is a “terrace”?”

Feng Ming snapped and shouted out in frustration about how “behind” these ancient folks were.

On the spot he gave a quick verbal lesson to the concept of utilizing terraces for cultivation of crops. It wasn’t helping as he couldn’t physically show Rong Tian on White Clouds back. Subsequently, Feng Ming convinced the Regent King to dismount.

Squatting on the grass like a child in a school’s playground, Feng Ming quickly hunted down a few rocks to use in his diagram he had drawn out with a stick.

After demonstrating the various terrace designs he had remembered from his era, he quickly rushed the Regent King to take him back up on the horse so they could resume their ride.

-“Let’s stop here.” The Prince asked when they reached the foothill of a small slope where they both dismounted again so the lesson on how to construct the foundations of the terraces could be taught.

Rong Tian listened earnestly, occasionally nodding his head. Finally a large smile stretched across his face, as the man was satisfied with the new knowledge gained. It also served as praise for the boy’s logic.

Even White Cloud could sense that the boy was gloating in the way he presented himself. This time he allowed Feng Ming to bath in Rong Tian’s attention. Instead of reclaiming his rightful position with his master, the white steed turned his attention on grazing to the side.

-“I understand the idea of installing levelled terraces, now what I don’t understand is how to resolve the irrigation problems...”

-“Irrigation is a major agricultural aspect. I was stupid I should have contributed earlier with what I know!”

It was evident by now that Feng Ming had been strongly influenced by Rong Tian. Now when it came down to business, he was equally serious and invested.

-“To my knowledge, there are several gold standards of agricultural irrigation from my era. There are tankers that carry loads of water and disperse them evenly to the crops. We could also install irrigation channels. Given that our challenge is uphill we can’t so apply the second option. There’s another possibility, if we were to build a large reservoir on the hill side and then allow it to accumulate rain water, then we can go forth with “canals”. Secondly, in the meantime we can deal with the water shortage by carrying by horse drawn tankers.”

The Regent King clasped his hands together in thought:

-“Although I don’t know what you mean by tankers and irrigation channels, I like the sound of harnessing rainwater and turning the mountains into useful land. If this plan is successful, Xi Rei’s agriculture will flourish.”

Having finished on that sentence, Rong Tian reached out and clutched onto Feng Ming’s hand. His eyes gazed out into the landscape with a glint of renewed hope for the land.

He could barely able to hide his excitement:

-“Feng Ming your knowledge is going to revolutionise Xi Rei. According to your suggestions, if

our plans carry through, we shall be able to transform this harsh environment to be one that will provide an endless supply of food to our people. This is more vital than any policies or country relations.”

The Regent King’s words were impassioned.

Feng Ming couldn’t help but to feel proud of this moment:

-“Of course, only I’m capable of turning you into a man of legend, the King of Kings.”

Rong Wang noticed the complete change in the Prince’s behaviour that went from a serious to the gloating child in front of him.

It made his heart flutter inside and he immediately drew Feng Ming into his arms and told the boy:

-“This will be a turning point in the history of Xi Rei. Shall we do something special to commemorate the occasion?”

-“What are we going to do?”

-“Naturally, I’m implying something romantic...”
Rong Wang chuckled as he had leaned over the Prince.

Feng Ming was pinned onto the grass under the Regent King’s body. Finally alert to what Rong Wang had been hinting at, he struggled and blushed.

Where they were lying was a decent patch of long brittle grass, just enough to conceal them if they were lying down.

-“It’s broad daylight, aren’t you even a bit ashamed of yourself?!”

Midway through his protest, the Regent King’s tongue entangled his own. The couple engaged their tongues exploring the moist warmth inside each other’s mouths.

A playful smile formed on Rong Wang’s lips, taking the lead as his hands probed beyond the folds of Feng Ming’s clothing, leaving the belt in place. His warm hands slipped in so he could caress the soft buds on the Prince’s chest, which hardened under the gentle attention.

-“Ahh...”

Feng Ming’s nipples were being tormented by the devil’s touch and he could not hold back a sob as the contact became unbearable. He started to whimper, he twisted his neck and the hue of pink flushed up from the nape to his cheeks.

The sight was certainly a temptation of flesh. Rong Tian felt his abdomen burn, his organ tingling with the surge of heat that raged havoc in his mind, especially when he was edged on by the stimulating sounds and sights beneath him. However, he knew he had to be patient with Feng Ming.

For now he worked on satisfying his lover. His hands kneaded the erection that peaked up from the lower half of Feng Ming's clothing, massaging in a cyclic motion until the boy arched his back to gasps out.

At that moment the Regent King locked his mouth over the opened lips, doubling the force and passion in his kiss, attacking those soft lips until he was left senseless.

Whenever Feng Ming was touched by Rong Tian, it was like he was in the hands of a professional that knew all the spots of his body to tease. The state of his mind left him powerless to effectively decline the heavy petting and it seems like he too had forgotten that he was "injured" yesterday.

Rong Tian had undone his outer cloak and laid it flat out on top of the earth beneath them. Just as he had shifted Feng Ming's flippant body to rest on the warm material to continue their session, both men heard a sudden burst of hooves galloping nearby.

The noise was drawing closer by each second, until it went completely past them. The Regent King could not help but to frown as the interruption had clearly spoilt the mood.

He had taken Feng Ming out of the Palace under the guise of a ride as a "couple". However, unknown to the Prince, the Regent King had ordered two squadrons of horsemen to stand guard a good distance away.

Since who ever had managed to bypass the guards, indicated their interruption was due to an emergency within the Imperial Palace that urgently required attention.

Although Rong Tian sat at the highest rank, he didn't even have the privilege of half a day off from his duties.

Rong Wang looked lovingly at Feng Ming and released a disappointed sigh. To be interrupted at such a romantic time where both of them were just about to peak...

Seeing there was no time to play anymore, it was only best to bundle up his lover and help him fasten his clothes and cloak before whoever had rode past returned.

Feng Ming, who had also heard the thundering hooves rushed past where they laid, knew it had meant their time together had fell through, his face turned gloomy.

The two mounted White Cloud and set off.

At a rapid pace they headed back to the Imperial Palace, where they were intercepted by a minor official who was acting as the messenger.

The man drew his reigns, dismounted and greeted the pair:

-“My respects to the Crowned Prince and Rong Wang.”

Rong Tian replied bitterly:

- “If you have something to say, go ahead.”

-“Yes Your Excellence! I’m here to report from the Palace that the King’s younger brother, An Xun of Fan Jia is on a tour to Xi Rei. He has almost reached the capital.”

Feng Ming looked a bit shocked.

God! I only heard about this man in the morning and he is here by the afternoon!

Considering An Xun is the son-in-law of Fan Jia’s King, Feng Ming wondered if he had brought along the Princess.

-“I understand. So An Xun has travelled to Xi Rei to represent Fan Jia. We will both quickly return to the Palace and welcome our guests.”

The pair’s plans for the day were aborted, as Rong Tian rushed back to the Imperial Palace with Feng Ming.

Chapter Eighteen

With Fan Jia's An Xun procession quickly looming the palace doors, Feng Ming and Rong Tian rushed back to their chambers, exchanging their riding garments for their official Court clothing.

The security had forwarded word that one important guest was making his way through the capital.

- "Open the gates!"

A chorus of sounding bells and beating drums welcomed the guests. The Court officials led by Feng Ming were all lined up in the front courtyard, standing before the main section of the Imperial Palace and all ready to greet their special visitors from afar.

The strangers were dressed in the attire of traditional to their country so each was wearing an iconic black cloak. One of the arrivals took the lead, walking in front with his chin up and dignified. On top of his head

was a glistening gold crown, needless to say this had to be the notorious An Xun.

-“Good to see you Prince An He.”

An Xun slowly paced towards Feng Ming, offering the slightest of bows, a gesture that was very gentlemanly.

-“An He is most delighted to see his Royal Uncle.” Feng Ming reciprocated the manners.

Although this man had married into another country, he was still capable of enforcing his blood inheritance. In Feng Ming’s imagination, he had expected to be confronted by a treacherous looking scoundrel instead he was pleasantly surprised at how handsome An Xun appeared.

There was definitely a similarity between “his” uncle and the Regent King. However, An Xun’s skin was pale and in an overall assessment he was slightly androgynous. Regardless, he was actually quite an attractive man.

-“Uncle has journeyed for so long, An He had to personally welcome your honorable presence, else it would be a complete shame.”

Feng Ming was basically biting his tongue as he picked his words. The unnatural pattern of speech was giving him a headache.

An Xun's eyes glazed over his nephew, sizing him up as a smile drew across his lips.

-“Many years have pasts since I’ve last seen you. Now the Prince is all grown up. Uncle is very relieved. Uncle has resided in Fan Jia for countless years and has not had the opportunity to visit your father, which I hope to make amend during this visit. Recently, I have heard rumors entailing my Royal brother’s condition. I’ve heard horrible news that his condition is growing dimmer. An Xun felt restless thus immediately rushed days and nights on end to return to brother’s side.”

Raising his hand he signaled a servant behind him. Moving to her master she produced a small shiny box.

Taking the box into his hands, An Xun opened the container and revealed the content had been delicately wrapped in layers and layers of intricate and beautiful linen. Indicating the content was something rare and exceptional.

-“This here is the secret treasure of Fan Jia, the Spirit of the Snake. It’s a preserved gallbladder that has been aged over a millennium. It has unspoken powers, capable of reversing a desperate situation. An Xun has personally arrived to Xi Rei with this gift and wishes to help your father’s illness. Dearest Prince if you could kindly lead the way to where my good brother rests...”

An Xun lifted his hand ushering the Prince to take the lead, with such a stunning speech and grand display of his loving intentions how was Feng Ming supposed to decline the invitation?

He needed a quick fix to cover the truth that the King of Xi Rei had long taken his last breath and it was impossible to take him to see the living being.

Feng Ming's eyes darted around desperately, catching Rong Wang's attention who immediately inserted:

- "The good King of Fan Jia An Xun✱ has traveled endlessly... How did you managed to get here? We only received word of your approach to the city."

An Xun had left Xi Rei for over ten years and had never returned during that period. However, he kept himself well informed about Xi Rei Court matters. The man who stood awe-inspiring that spoke unwavering to him was no doubt the newly appointed Regent King, RongWang.

He understood that the man was in control and dominated the current political affairs of Xi Rei. He felt that this new "Rong Wang" had an even more overbearing and powerful presence in contrast to his predecessor, his father. There was an air of mystery around the confident handsome face.

- "On this trip, I was carrying a precious cargo. The travel plans were rushed and the number of troops in

the entourage was minimal for convenience. To prevent mishaps along the way, the soldiers were ordered to cover our tracks as we sullied forth to Xi Rei for this great emergency. It was only when we reached the city was it necessary to erect the flags of Fan Jia.”

An Xun lifted his gaze and settled momentarily on the Regent King before turning his eyes towards Feng Ming. He cupped his hands in obeisance and lifted up to ask for a pardon:

- “Uncle’s failure to notify you of my pending arrival was my fault, forgive me My Prince.”

- “There’s nothing to be pardoned and no need for such formalities. You are my blood relative, why this degree of courtesy?”

- “Most importantly is my dear brother’s sickness, I would like to meet with Xi Rei’s King at once.” He persisted by bringing back the topic of seeing the King in person almost too casually.

Feng Ming played with the information he had been given. An Xun definitely had the upper hand. The King was nothing but a death body. He couldn’t help but shudder at the level of cunning acting his uncle was portraying in this pre-emptive attack.

Just as he was about to signal to Rong Tian for a helping hand, the Regent King intercepted the ball once again.

- “The King is in the Inner Palace recuperating, he is currently not seeing any outsiders. However Fan Jia’s King is also the Royal brother of Xi Rei’s King who has brought a medical treasure for the King to use, hence, it is a different story altogether. May I have the honor of leading Fan Jia Wang to the King?”

- “That is good.”

An Xun had succeeded in achieving his goal. He set aside the treasure in his hands showing that he was eager to depart.

Rong Wang tilted his head, eyeing the vast numbers of Fan Jia’s guards that had escorted the Royal visitor.

- “The King is resting. I’m afraid we must not disturb him.”

- “Certainly.” An Xun simply replied.

He knew the meaning behind the man’s words so he turned around and commanded his men:

- “All stand down and wait for my return in the annex, only Xun Tian is permitted to remain as my personal guard.”

Feng Ming had no idea concerning Rong Wang’s intentions. Were they taking An Xun to see the cold dead corpse that lied in the icy crypt?

He was a nervous wreck. He couldn't help but to secretly tugged at the Regent King's sleeve. Catching the man's attention he signaled desperately with his eyes, along the lines of:

"What the hell are we going to do?!"

Rong Tian issued him a sly smile.

The party of important men entered the inner grounds of the Palace and walked towards the Queen's quarters.

Feng Ming knew the location of the King's body. It was hidden deep in a maze of corridors that lead to an underground cavern. But with An Xun and his personal guard easing towards Xi Rei's largest and darkest secret he couldn't help but feel apprehensive of what was to come.

There was no comfort from Rong Tian who had walked beside him.

- "The King has been recuperating within the Empress's quarters." Rong Tian pointed at the closed doors.

The men had reached the gates for the grand entrance into the intricate network of the Queen's chambers.

- “I can finally see my Royal brother. I wonder whether the years have changed his appearance.” An Xun sighed loudly.

Pushing pass the entrance the four men entered the reception hall.

Due to the Queen’s preference of a serene environment, inside the building was only guarded by a few soldiers. Rather it was filled with several maids that occupied themselves with cleaning and tending to the gardens.

Upon seeing who had entered, the servants all quickly paid their respects to the men.

They continued their way, threading through the spacious reception hall and into the grand hall. It was the room that was used for the official greetings during the Queen’s Birthday ceremony.

The Prince was shaking as he maintained his wits about him. Everything that has happened so far felt like a strange drama. The problem was that this was real people, real props and now the story has developed into the climax that was riddled with tension.

Usually on television, in a moment like this his heart would react by pounding in suspension... At least a commercial break would timely switch on and let his heart relaxes.

But this wasn't television and he didn't have that luxury. Everything was flowing down a rapid river without stopping.

Once they turn out of the main hall and pass a several complex corridors they will be facing the secret chamber.

Was Rong Tian serious about letting An Xun meet with the King? Or was this a decoy, so he could lure them into the room, entrap them and let them freeze to death in the dismal prison?

Feng Ming thought about all the possibilities. His mind jumping from one conclusion to another completely preoccupied with his thoughts.

Sure enough they had made a turn heading in the right direction as Rong Tian continued navigate the men. Turning into the second corridor, all four men were startled by something unexpected.

-“Oh?”

-“Ah!!”

Chapter Nineteen

At the entrance of the torch illuminated corridor, a sole figure adorned with simple silk robes was kneeling.

Facing the eerie lit long stretch of corridor in front of them, the person had his head lowered and keeping silence even with the uninvited guests.

The rows of torches lighting the path crackled, the flames danced and flickered. Those who were familiar with the face could barely identify the person by her profile and one could immediately notice that she was a beautiful women.

The unexpected road block was the woman who rarely ventured out of her chambers, the Queen of Xi Rei.

These four grown men had been startled, each crying out alarm when they had first caught sight of her and now after catching their breaths they exchanged looks.

Rong Wang approached quietly, kneeling behind the Empress and whispered:

- “Your Highness, the son in law of Fan Jia’s King has arrived. An Xun has personally returned to Xi Rei offering a gift to give our King a rare medicine.

Where the party had paused was narrow and although Rong Wang’s voice was soft, there was a slight echo that returned from the distance.

Even with the flames flickering down this passage, it felt as if the other end was going to swallow you with darkness.

The Queen provided no immediate answer. Her head was still slightly tilted downwards as if she was occupied in her own little world. After a while she finally responded, however there was no change in her expression:

- “I know.”

After providing this short sentence she returned to her taciturn behavior. Not a sound as she continued to kneel in the corridor. Her presence was sealing off the path. She lifted her head up focusing her eyes at a pinpoint towards the end of the dark tunnel.

Everyone was growing uncomfortable and as the Queen was stalling their visit and making it impossible to bypass her. The awkward silence was piercing and no one wanted to overstep their authority. As long as the

Empress remained in her position, she was cordoning the path to see the King of Xi Rei.

At this point, Feng Ming did play with the idea that this sudden road block could possibly be part of Rong Tian's master plan by employing the Queen in this emergency to stall for more time.

What would happen if An Xun gets impatient and charges through? Doesn't that mean this plan is flawed?

The scenario that ended badly in his mind made him shudder. He flashed his eyes across to see how An Xun was reacting to this barricade.

Surprisingly, An Xun appeared to be calm and without any intention of marching his way through the Queen's vigil. On the contrary, his face had paled like a ghost and his hands were balling up. If you looked closely, beneath the thick layers of clothing you could see that he was trembling slightly. It was obvious that the sight of the Empress had a very big impact on him.

How peculiar! Don't tell me that there's hostility between the Queen and An Xun...

No one knew how to react to the Queen's antics.

Suddenly she finally spoke breaking the tension with a forlorn voice:

- "Since long ago the King has been ill and I am his Queen, thus by status it is my duty to oversee the

prayer rituals. I've persistently recited prayers to the Heavens at a boundary a hundred paces from where he is now resting. This is a matter of the King's life and death, if there is any intruders the spiritual powers would weaken. At this moment no one is permitted to disturb the King until I am completed with my prayers and receive a mandate from the Heavens."

Without turning back she ordered her son:

- "An He, you are the King's flesh and blood. Kneel beside me and start praying to the Heavens for your father's recovery."

Feng Ming didn't believe in such things, but he had no alternative route. This was the Queen's personal order, there was no way out.

It was best he assume the exterior of a filial son. So he answer to his mother's beckoning and kneel obediently beside her without a word.

He thought inside:

- 'How long are we supposed to pray? Until we receive a divine answer? What was this mandate from the Heavens? What if they had to be on their knees for another three to five days just to get a response, would it be a bad sign?

The Queen gently reasoned:

- "An Xun, you are also of Imperial blood, quickly kneel and pray for your Royal brother's health."

Feng Ming lowered his face from out of view, trying to hide the shock horror when he heard the Queen's second command. The woman was audacious, even ordering An Xun as if he was her subordinate. True enough, his uncle was lesser of rank but none the less he had return to Xi Rei carrying another Royal title to his name. He was certainly no ordinary man.

If the Queen could control him with her words along, why would there be a need for Rong Tian to intervene? Wouldn't it be better if she'd directly tell him to beat it!

- "An Xun will follow your wish."

To everyone's surprise An Xun submitted to the Empress and immediately went down on his knees next to Feng Ming.

Feng Ming swallowed the knot that had developed in his throat. The two men were side by side, aligned behind the woman.

The Prince's guesses were proven wrong, nothing was turning out like he had anticipated and he didn't like the situation which was growing ominous with each second. He bit down on his tongue fretting about his current predicament.

Nervously he flashed his eyes sideways in an attempt S.O.S. signal Rong Tian. The plight was short lived when he was abruptly shaken by the Queen's calm voice who had not once turned to face the men.

“Only the people of Imperial blood are able to pray, others withdraw.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Rong Tian replied promptly.

He had anticipated the Queen’s next move. Complying with her command he offered her a respectful bow.

Feng Ming knew that now he was in for it, this was an emergency. Knowing that his own thread of hope was departing he was even more desperate with his voiceless pleas. His frantic eyes caught hold of the older man, who paid no heed and only offered the younger man a faint smile.

The other person remaining was An Xun’s personal guard, who was awaiting his master’s orders.

An Xun followed suit, nodding:

- “Leave us and wait outside for me. Without my order, do not enter.”

With this Rong Tian and the guard disappeared from sight. Once the men left quiet washed over the dark corridor.

Feng Ming kept his head lowered slightly and he was nearly motionless. His eyes darted around, from the Queen’s back and then sideways to the man who had easily obeyed her orders.

He thought inside, given the scenario it couldn't be that the three of us would talk? But at this very moment the atmosphere was strange and he didn't dare to take the initiative to ask questions to get the ball rolling.

They weren't exactly best friends he could casually talk to.

Feng Ming sighed inwardly, cursing his string of bad luck and decided it was best to keep his mouth corked and ignore the pain that was shooting up from his cramped legs.

The three unlikely candidates remained kneeling for a good hour and the Prince cursed even more when his calf muscles gave up on him to the powers of paralysis.

Inside he had conjured new words and nasty names he could use to scold his uncle. He had practice them numerous times inside his head. With his squinted eyes he checked on the other two but they remained solid as a clay figurine, unbending to the pains of the body.

Breaking the silence, the Queen suddenly inserted:

- "An Xun is your purpose here to claim the throne?"

Feng Ming nearly reeled backwards as he had never expected that the Empress was capable of speaking so directly. Her tone was serious and she meant business.

He was amazed by the fact that she exposed An Xun's motives by hitting the nail on the head.

His uncle hesitated for a moment before collecting his words:

- "There is the throne, yet there are other things."

Feng Ming's eyes widened completely gob smacked. He had not expected the man to be so straight forwards, with no sense of need to cover up his intentions to steal the throne.

Hmph! Clearly he doesn't treat the Prince as a threat... He is trampling all over me!

Thinking about being looked down on, Feng Ming shot a piercing look at An Xun.

- "You still want something else? So many years have gone and you refuse to give up?" The Queen prompted, her voice remained unwavering.

An Xun was stifled, his body language was agitated. With his hands clenched he replied:

- "... During that time...that time he stole you, if it wasn't for him... we'd... we'd..."

By now both his hands were shaking uncontrollably. He started to lean forwards towards the Queen. He stopped halfway, barely able to contain

himself, as his body wanted to throw his arms around her.

Feng Ming watched the scene unroll in front of his wide eyes. He was a complete bystander. His mind was hitting the red abort button!

Calm down heart! I can't believe the Queen and my Royal Uncle were an old flame... This is insane!

Even ancient people were capable of being so romantic.

From what he manage to gather, it seems that An Xun received the shorter end of the stick. Feng Ming couldn't help but feel sorry for the guy.

Then his thoughts trailed to other aspects of the story, parts where he had to deal with. The Queen was his mother by name. Now given the likelihood that An Xun would force himself on her, would he be responsible for protecting her? If he intercepted their attempt to reignite an old flame, then won't he be stripping away their opportunity to enjoy a second Spring✧?

Even if he was to defend her, An Xun was well schooled in martial arts and he'd be immediately exposed as a counterfeit Prince. If he didn't protect her from his uncle's assault then wouldn't he be...

All these possibilities were making a big mess in his mind, and then the Queen continued:

- “Do you mean you intend to seize everything that was taken from you?”

-“Correct!” His uncle answered with no hesitation.

The Queen trembled then she finally whipped around to face her two relatives, proudly stating:

- “I am already the Queen of Xi Rei. I’m not that naive Mu Lan that you once knew! Don’t set out in vain! Stop deluding yourself!”

-“As long as I ascend the throne, I will be King and you will be my Queen.” An Xun begged.

- “An Xun, this is madness!”

- “No! I have not gone mad. Do you know how many years or the countless hardships I have struggled through, just to reach this day?” He pleaded love sick.

Feng Ming watched on as the two high ranked individuals took turns on the stage. This was one crazy classical romance. These star crossed lovers continued to exchange their lines and the Prince could only pivot his head from left to right and from right to left.

Their voices and composure were thrown out of the window, both man and woman had forgotten their identities. The words that were spat across made the

corridor feel like a battlefield, such dialogue was uncalled for.

An Xun spat:

- "In order to escape from my Royal Brother's scrutiny, I married into the Royal family of Fan Jia. Taking one of their princess's as my bride, however my heart has never left your side. Mu Lan, my brother is already dead, as long as I claim the throne and overtake Xi Rei the Queen would be allowed to remain. We can finally be together. Don't you want this?"

The ardent voice of her old lover reminded her of the innocent love they once shared. Her face was tormented with sorrow.

- "Do I want this? I am the Queen, it is my responsibility to protect the King's bloodline, so Xi Rei can rise above the other countries."

She turned to stare down the depth of the cold corridor, before bitterly enquiring:

- "An Xun I ask of you, once you are King, what will become of this mother and child? What of Xi Rei Kingdom's future?"

- "As long as you become my Queen, I would have the love for my country as a true King would. I will forgive the past and rule the land fairly."

- “You have not given me a full reply. What is my son’s fate?”

An Xun quickly shot a quick glance over Feng Ming as if he had been a fly on the wall. There was nothing but viciousness in the man’s eyes.

The Prince released a muffle gasps.

- “He is my brother’s flesh and blood.” His voice was hoarse and disgusted.

The Empress replied with the same tenacity of displeasure:

- “That child is also my flesh and blood.”

“Mu Lan...” An Xun continued, as if Feng Ming did not exist.

He softly coaxed:

- “Our future will give us the opportunity to bring fruits✱ to our love and have our own offspring.”

-“If you can talk with such confidence, does that mean you came prepared? It is only natural that the Crowned Prince would fight you for the throne, but...”

Then the light was extinguished in the Queens eyes, as if she just decided it was too much for her and she wanted to give up.

She paused for a long while before finally confessing:

- "To tell you the truth, the King has passed away years ago."

She had revealed Xi Rei's biggest secret, and it had escaped from her lips so easily! She showed no remorse for her actions. The news stunned An Xun, his eyes fixated on her in disbelief. Even Feng Ming was shell shocked. She just exposed the only thing that was keeping Xi Rei safe, how were they going to deal with the aftermath?

It didn't take long for An Xun to snap out of his surprise. He nodded and claimed:

- "I had expected that, however I had no evidence over the years. Otherwise, we did not need to be separated for so many years."

- "You must understand that I had worked extremely hard to hide this secret over the years. I did not want you to discover the truth. I did not want you to come back for the throne. I didn't want Xi Rei to be covered in blood..."

Then she finally admitted:

- "I did not want to see my son or the love of my life die in this feud!"

- "This is brother's fruit and not mine!"

- "I've had enough, I am tired of this. As Xi Rei's Queen, I can't allow the end of our dynasty. Only the

Royals can settle the matters of the throne. From the two of you, I will pick the one that will become the King.”

The Queen’s tired eyes looked back and forth from Feng Ming to An Xun. They both held their breath, waiting for her crucial decision.

Then the Queen asked An He’s Uncle:

- “I have been informed that in the mountain passes of Xi Rei, you have several bases. There are men there under orders that if you were to come to harm, they shall poison the drinking wells throughout the country. You have also prepared foreign alliances to attack Xi Rei in order to ensure that the Crowned Prince will never rule. Explain yourself!”

After those revealing words, the Crowned Prince gaped at An Xun. The man’s beauty was misleading because his heart was rotten to the core.

A smile eased on An Xun’s lips, he remained quiet as if it was to confirm the Queen’s sources.

-“It appears that if I was to lay a finger on you, Xi Rei will be facing a catastrophe. In such a time of crisis, I have to sacrifice my own son, for the sake of preserving the peace of my country.”

The Queens eyes set upon Feng Ming, making him shudder. Feng Ming felt as if he was a juicy frog that a venomous snake had spotted and he broke out in a cold sweat.

Her eyes bore holes into him before she managed to approve of her choice.

- “As the Crowned Prince, to sacrifice yourself for your country is your duty. As your mother, I am very proud of you.”

Then she shifted back her attention to An Xun:

- “I will help you become the new King. However if you act now, this will easily stir criticism in the Court. The Prince is due to ascend the throne in March next year. At this time you can officially challenge him.”

A chaotic storm was thundering and striking lightning bolts overhead, Feng Ming froze. The development was strange, he had no idea what was happening and everything was playing out like a long nightmare.

An Xun had expected the Empress would compromise to his favor. His face was beaming with a wicked smile:

- “However, by next March the Prince would have the chance to claim the throne. If I keep him around, it would be too much of a risk.”

Hearing this, she stayed speechless and then released a sigh:

“You are forcing me... to...” She bit her lip.

- “Well, for the sake of Xi Rei I am willing to do anything. Go on, make your move. I will announce that

the Prince has fallen ill and share the same symptoms as the King. Once March arrives, I will formally declare that the Crowned Prince had passed away. You will be appointed the new King. However, before anything else you must withdraw any spies and underlings you have stationed across our land. A black list of names shall be publicized and these men must ally themselves with Xi Rei. This plan will ultimately serve to avoid any disasters in Xi Rei.”

- “Withdraw my spies?” He raised an eyebrow.

The Queen looked at Feng Ming as she said:

- “I am already willing to sacrifice my son. His fate is in your hands now. Once the Crowned Prince is gone, there is no one that can compete for the throne. You are the only one left standing, who else can I trust? Why would there be a need for spies? The future of Xi Rei will be finally settled.”

As she concluded her plans, she reached within the folds of her white robe and produced a small bottle in the palm of her hand.

The long forgotten bystander shuddered, just listening to the cold twisted conversation that played out before Feng Ming had his heart pounding and his body urging him to run. As An Xun and the Queen continued their devious conversation, the Prince had started to inch backwards along the side of the wall for the exit. When he was finally near safety, he whisked around and found his only exit had been blocked by a wooden door and

unknowingly to him, had been barricaded from the outside.

The door did not budge as he pushed against it in frustration. This could have been the Queens doing. It was possible that she had this all planned out, she certainly wanted to get rid of someone. When he turned his attention back to the estranged lovers he noticed that An Xun was now holding the vial that previously sat in the Empress's palm.

His uncle was heading towards him now, step by step. With nowhere to run, Feng Ming was frightened stiff and the word "Poison" quickly spouted in his mind.

Why? Why do they want to kill me?

Feng Ming felt An Xun's sinister eyes set on him the once handsome face was now contorted with a unfriendly sneer. The Queen remained indifferent, expressionless like a mannequin watching on.

That's right! A spark lit up, the Queen is willing to have me killed, so that An Xun would abandon his plan to force his way onto the throne. Once she obtains a blacklist Rong Tian would be able to deal with An Xun at a later date. Then when March comes, her true son would finally be able to ascend the throne with no opposition. I am just a mere pawn. This is a perfect opportunity to eradicate all enemies against her son.

*Such a complicated plan, who was the mastermind?
Was it the Regent King? Did Rong Tian sacrifice me just to
secure him a safe passage to the throne?*

Just the thought of this betrayal weakened Feng Ming at his knees. His body felt powerless and he stumbled backwards against a corner. His eyes searching erratically for help as An Xun closed in their proximity.

In his moment of peril, the different faces of Rong Tian he had encountered surfaced in his vision, as if they were little mirages hurtling in a cycle in front of him.

The furious, the terrible, the smiling, the gentle, the coy and ambiguous... And even the moment they shared with the short lived "Spring of Love" ... Where was he now?

Snapping back to reality, he retraced the scene that was played out in front of him. Everything had had happened toppled the mountains and overturned the seas. There was no logic, it was insane! He wanted to wildly scream.

This is impossible! This isn't right!

A sharp pain hit his heart, his throat tightened as if a vacuum had been installed in place. His teeth trembled but he couldn't manage a word.

An Xun stood overbearingly over him. Although his Uncle appeared weak, Fan Jia's King was well

learned in martial arts so he didn't even see Feng Ming as a challenge.

A hand reached over to lift up Feng Ming's chin roughly. Blood thirsty eyes pinned him to the spot:

-“Drink this now. You will die immediately, there will be no pain.”

Feng Ming pursed his lips until they were firmly closed. His large eyes looked on with despair, and finally he muttered:

-“Rong Tian...”

Sadly his plea was too soft and An Xun did not even care to listen to a dying man's words.

-“Don't strain yourself with any last words. I have already selected the perfect departing lines for you.” An Xun advised.

-“The Heavens have not granted me the gift of a long life on earth. For the sake of the Kingdom, the throne should be entrusted to my Royal Uncle in order to maintain Xi Rei's prosperity’.”

With that said, his hands easily pried Feng Ming's jaw open as the younger man was unable to put up any resistance. He tipped the volume of the bottle down the Prince's throat.

Feng Ming gagged as the cold substance entered his mouth and slipped down his throat unhindered. The

taste was sweet but Feng Ming's mind was filled with bitterness.

He was holding onto the last strand of hope that his lover would break through the door, save him and hold him in his arms and tell him that this was all a ploy to lure out their enemy.

The toxic liquid began to sear his windpipe, his stomach churned and he bellowed over collapsing into a heap. His vision was clouded with flickering white spots.

Letting go of that last hope, he allowed himself to sink into the pit of darkness, a familiar place called death.

Chapter Twenty

Feng Ming slowly slumped into the cold darkness of the shadows that dance with the flickering flames.

An Xun knelt beside the boy, snatching the slender wrist to survey for a pulse. He wanted certification that the last beat was exhausted from the dying body. Satisfied, he relinquished with absolute disgust the lifeless arm and stood up.

The Queen was closely behind, standing to one side. Her tear glistened eyes swept over the motionless Prince.

Her voice was calm and gentle:

-“For your sake, I have sacrificed my own child. There is no mother under the Heavens as heartless as I am. Keep your word and recall your spies in Xi Rei and you will also avoid any outsiders taking advantage of leads, else you will endanger Xi Rei.”

In contrary to her emotionless state, a turbulent sea of sorrow raged inside the Empress. The elaborate display of loyalty and submission to her old lover today was all part of a ploy to force An Xun onto a path of no return.

Her heart still urged her to deny An Xun's profound love, even after all these years. Her eyes were dampened by her tears. She was crying for An Xun.

Naturally, the poison that Feng Ming was force feed was potent but alas a fake.

An Xun nodded in agreement:

- "Good. There's no Crowned Prince, who else could oppose me now? My men are no longer the needed in the grand scheme."

He suddenly released a deep growl, his hand shot to his waist where he drew out a hidden dagger. The distinct sound of metal scrapping against the sheath echoed in the hall. It was ear splitting. Shivers ran down the Queen's spine, as the sharp blade eerily reflected the fire light.

Fear struck down with a heavy hand, she trembled as she dared to ask:

- "An Xun, what are you doing?"

- "Mu Lan, It's not that I do not believe you..."

An Xun wielded the sharp object threateningly, his voice had a gentleness reserved only for his lover whom he also offered a smile to.

-“Merely I do not want take any risks. Xi Rei’s Royal Arcanum excels in the art of medicine and they’ve developed ones riddle with mystery for assorted purposes. There’s a possibility that their drug was designed to feign death and the manner of his death gives me no ease.”

He smiled:

-“Which will be resolved, if I wound him mortally to guarantee his death.”

He waved the weapon and said:

- “I can be assured that he will not rise from the dead. Then I shall hand over my last bargaining chip to you.”

Rong Tian had been especially concerned with Feng Ming’s safety. With one stab, who can guarantee that there will be any life left to recover?

The color drained from the Queen’s face.

-“The Prince is dead, aren’t you satisfied? Don’t tell me you won’t even allow me to preserve his corpse?”

- “Rest assured, after I stab him several times, I will have his wounds sewn.”

-“An Xun!” The Queen’s raised her voice in disbelief.

- “Mu Lan, we are adults now and far from the innocent days we spent as playmates.”

An Xun clenched his fists on the handle and issued her a bitter laugh:

- “In the end you were his mother, both involved in the title of the King and keeping the throne in his bloodline. Haven’t I been treading carefully? Everything was for this moment, my love. The affections I have for you will never change. Not now, not forever.”

Taking a couple of steps back, the man’s words struck the Queen like high voltage electric shots. She couldn’t bear to hear her past lover’s confession, as the words echoed in her mind it left her critically damaged. Her emotions were in turmoil.

Her legs were numb and they faltered beneath her she managed to catch her balance by supporting herself off the wall behind her.

Eyes closed, she shook her head slightly and in a soft voice:

- “His body no longer has a pulse, yet you insist on scarring my child’s remains? Will you withdraw your men afterwards then?”

- “Where is the problem, if he has no pulse then it wouldn’t matter if I inflict wounds on his body with this

knife? I'll withdraw my men when my doubts have eased. From then onwards I'll ensure Xi Rei's security and nothing will come to harm this land."

At that very moment, it appeared that if the Empress was to obstruct An Xun's bidding she would certainly rouse suspicions. She stood there, staring intently with much hesitation, remaining silent as millions of thoughts turned in her mind. Rong Wang's face surfaced in her thoughts, his face that had her trust and the imagery of Xi Rei in cindering smoke of war torn times.

Biting her lips, she finally gave the sign of approval to An Xun, settling on the safety of Xi Rei as the most important agenda she could choose between the two choices.

- "Very well, if this is the case then let's put this matter to rest. Proceed and do as you please. Aim for the heart, this way no miracle of medicine will bring the Crowned Prince back to life. You should be at ease."

An Xun's face lit up, cheerful at the shift of power.

- "Mu Lan, I know you are hurting inside. After all he is your son, don't worry once I ascend the throne, I will ensure he is given a proper grand burial befitting of his status."

He looked down at the unconscious Prince, his eyes glossed in savage glimmer. Wielding his murder weapon with both his hands, he raised it above the chest cavity, aiming directly for the boy's heart.

As he motioned to pierce his prey a sudden a loud thunderous clap interrupted the tragic scene. An intruder had kicked down the wooden door. Like a whirlwind the sole figure charged into the narrow passageway.

The couple was thrown off as the man swung into action at lightning speed brandishing a sword that aimed a slash at An Xun's head. He had taken the Fan Jia's King by surprise.

Luckily, An Xun's dagger quickly switched position, his attention immediately diverted from the Prince. The years of the man's experience showed as his reaction time saved him from a vital wound.

CLANG!!

The screech of metal clashing was deafening as An Xun blocked another murderous blow from his attacker. However the force behind the attempt was enough to leave his owns arms numb.

An Xun was confronted by the face of a raging lion engulfed by anger. This beast was powerful and deep in a frenzy of adrenaline. The intruder's handsome face snarled with benevolence.

Rong Tian retracted his arms and initiated a continuous onslaught at the man's vital points, thrusting his blade with such agility An Xun barely managed to keep defending.

The Regent King was unrelenting as the rhythm of colliding weapons intensified. The younger man gave no room for recovery, clearly indicating that there will only be one survivor at the end of this battle.

CLING!

CLANG!

CLING! CLANG!

Flints flew from the point of contact between their swords as the men demonstrated their skills and talent. Rong Wang fighting style was flamboyant and powerful, each swipe had excellent precision. Although his age was tender, he was not shy in tactic and performance. Such gallant pose was rarely seen in swordplay, it was becoming apparent to who was the weaker in this deadly game.

An Xun's years were catching up to him, he staggered slightly dodging the swift swish of Rong Tian's blade. His breath was labored and he knew he was reaching his limits in contrast to the fitter Regent King. Making a cowardly withdrawal, he backed towards the speechless Queen his eyes glared at her.

-“Mu Lan, hurry and order him to stop!” He yelled with all his might.

The Queen had watched wide eyed like a stunned fish. She had bitten her lips until they were bruised and her complexion was like starched linen.

Regardless of any impending commands the Regent King did not hesitate to seize the opportunity, he took the opening. At the speed of light he outstretched his sword and dislodged the weapon from his enemy’s hands with a flick of his wrists. Quickly in one stride he was in range to inflict the finishing move on the older man. With no escape he brought his blade down and brutally slashed An Xun.

When the blade struck, An Xun could only return a helpless expression.

- “Stop!”

A blood curdling scream came from the Empress but unfortunately it was too late to intervene.

Rong Tian could not care less for grace. He had slammed his blade from An Xun’s scalp down to his abdomen. The older man’s muffled scream was mixed with the gargling of blood. He slumped down on the very spot he was wounded. A disturbing sound came from his bloodied lungs before he finally expired.

Although their match only lasted a few moments, Rong Tian had put a violent end to Xi Rei's biggest threat.

-“An Xun...”

The Queen's voice trembled. She had just witness a cold blooded murder. Her legs rushed to the dead man's side she had nothing now, but the aftermath. She bowed her head down to that familiar face, emotions floated to the surface. A mix of anger, pain, disbelief and bitterness clouded her mind and tears flowed like rivers down her cheeks. She turned to face the killer, her own son.

- “W-Why did you kill him?” She spat out as she cradled An Xun's head on her thighs.

Rong Wang's anger was only fanned by her actions. He coldly stared down at the pair.

- “This man is a traitor of Xi Rei. He even dared to conspire to ascend the throne with underhanded means, yet the Queen weeps for him?”

- “Rong Tian!” The Queen scowled at her child in a sharp tone wanting no more of his cruel words. She tried to calm her emotions and gasped for breath between her sobs.

“Everything I have done, has always been for you, don't you understand? Everything could have been resolved if you didn't barge in here in cold blood. Why

did you have to destroy everything we have worked so hard for?” She screamed.

Instead of answering, Rong Tian turned, paced towards his lover and gathered the young boy into his arms. His eyes softened and even if the fury subsided, he was completely captivated by Feng Ming.

-“The original plan, did not include Feng Ming’s death.” His voice was chilled as ice.

-“It was a matter of urgency. In order to protect Xi Rei, why can’t we sacrifice this imposter? You willingly threw away our perfect strategy and brought upon a catastrophe for Xi Rei? All for this fake Prince?”

- “Feng Ming is not as simple as an imposter. When the Queen has time, she should consider listening to his theories and opinions on the matters of ruling this country. This boy is the most precious treasure Xi Rei has in its possession. As for An Xun’s untimely death, I shall handle the repercussions.”

With one hand steadily holding his bounty, he uncloaked the mantle he was wearing and gently wrapped Feng Ming in a tight bundle.

He murmured with a hint of annoyance as his gazed pitifully at his lover:

- “Once the poison subsides Feng Ming should awake but not without any after effects. If I had known

earlier that this ploy was useless, I wouldn't have him suffer like this."

Reflecting on her choices, the Queen knew her decision to use Feng Ming as the bargaining chip was the reason why Rong Tian was furious with her. She could tell by the tenderness in her son's eyes for the younger man.

She trembled in disbelief, her son had abandoned her.

- "Rong Tian, you... You are angry with me? I did this for your throne, for your Xi Rei." Her words quivered with every word.

At this moment, she didn't even pay mind to her country's future. The words that left her mouth were from a mother that truly loved her child and couldn't deal with being shunned because of her wrong doing.

With his back facing the Empress, Rong Tian softened to her desperate cries:

- "A mother's hardship, is always for her child. Only that I ask of the Queen that you must not bring harm to Feng Ming ever again."

Reaching to stroke Feng Ming's face, he could feel a slight rise in the boy's temperature. Life was returning to the motionless body, a sign that the drug was wearing off.

Rong Tian turned to face his mother, his eyes catching hers as he sincerely informed her:

-“ If Mother wants to act upon Rong Tian’s sake, then please treat Feng Ming as if he is your own blood and flesh. I...we...”

He frowned and released a deep sigh, cutting his sentence short. He was determined to not linger a moment longer so he bowed slightly at the Queen to excuse himself, taking Feng Ming with him.

All the Empress could do was to watch as her son walked defiantly away from her. All the energy drained from her body and she slumped down on the spot.

Heartbroken by the turn of events, she looked sadly down at An Xun’s dead profile. His once handsome face was tormented to the very last breath of his life. He had died with his eyes wide open.

Her tears poured down like a faucet as she grieved. The salty drops mixed with the dried blood on the man’s face.

- “I didn’t want this. Why did you return here? Why did you have to challenge my son?”

Her hand shook violently as she traced her fingers over the cheeks of the face marred by the wound.

She cried and wallowed.

-“This is a curse of being a Mother! Can’t you even understand something so simple?” She wailed.

-“As Xi Rei’s Queen, how could I be idly sitting on the sidelines when you want to violate this country? An Xun, you are brave but still so foolish! With all the spies across this country threatening Xi Rei, tell me how am I to deal with them now?”

Her ex-lover provided no answer. His eyes emptied and soulless, only wrought with despair and disbelief.

The cold of the hallway had long welcomed him and all that could be heard was the Queens muffled sobs.

- “Even though you couldn’t ascend the throne, my heart was always yours...”

She wept until she couldn’t bare the sight of An Xun’s open eyes any longer. She reached out with her pale jade-like hands and gently brushed the lids so they closed, changing the pained expression so he could be at rest.

The violent death of An Xun within Xi Rei’s Palace quickly traveled across the country. It wasn’t long until the country of Fan Jia caught wind of the news, sending the country in a complete uproar. A chaotic mess of a raging diplomatic storm was heading to Xi Rei.

Even countries border-lining Xi Rei were now restless.

Chapter Twenty-one

The after-effects of the poison were evident and took a heavy toll on the Prince's feeble body. Even though Feng Ming's pulse returned to a regular pace he was immersed in a spell of deep slumber.

Needless to say, Xi Rei's Kingdom was now in a state of emergency. Their political ties were in complete disarray. Adding fuel to the fire, Fan Jia's Royal family had pronounced that they will be seeking retribution against the whole country for the breach of confidence and betrayal.

Government officials surged to the frontline of the political battle, attempting to hold back each state from falling blindly headfirst into a bloody war.

Fortunately the Regent King was able to create an intricate cover up and his efforts eventually eased the hectic Court and the restless officials which had the nations in a standstill.

As countless matters were being settled over the bargaining table, Feng Ming remained unconscious and oblivious.

Several days had past following the return of peace to the Courtrooms, sadly, the Prince's body remained unmoving in the middle of his large bed. His condition had not improved and every pair of concerned eyes was glued on the boy waiting for any signs of improvement.

Included among the eagerly waiting subjects, were a set of blazing eyes that kept the Prince in his line of sight. Naturally, they belonged to Rong Tian.

Suddenly a soft groan finally released the tension:
- "Nnhh..."

The lips that had been pursed throughout the ordeal had opened ever so slightly giving a muffled noise to everyone's pleasant surprise.

A rosy taint had already returned to Feng Ming's cheeks. A positive turn indicating he may be ready to wake soon.

Each servant had participated in vigil for days on end in hope that the Prince would recover. Now it was apparent their master was awakening, everyone

continued to look on with anticipation, holding their breath.

The Prince's lush and long eyelashes began to dance, as the heavy lids beckoned them to part. As if shy under the close scrutiny of his onlookers, the movement suddenly ceased.

After a delay his large eyes abruptly opened.

The pair of intoxicating dark eyes that had been hidden for numerous days was finally open and at the moment he peered out towards his observers, an overzealous joy rushed into the crowd.

Exuberant cheers echoed the halls:

- "His Majesty has awakened!"

- "He has awakened!"

Praises for the Heavens were belted out:

- "Heavens bless!"

Within the hustle and joy of the servants, Chiu Lan immediately knelt beside her master and prayed to the Gods in thanks.

The Regent King made no delay, striding to the bed and presenting himself in all his glory beside to the boy. He placed Feng Ming's wrist into his own hands surveying for the strength of his lover's pulse✽.

- “Do you still remember who I am? Where are you hurting?” He prompted anxiously.

Feng Ming had just awoken and he was aching from head to toe. Raising his head to gain a better view of the Regent King, he then recalled why he was in this predicament in the first place. However, he was in no state give Rong Tian a chewing.

As he was about to attempt a few words, Feng Ming was interrupted by a series of short chuckling.

-“Rong Wang need not be worried.” The unfamiliar voice offered.

-“Our legendary potion will absolutely never fail. Your servant, Official Xia is willing to use his life to guarantee this fact. The Crowned Prince was unconscious for seven days and it has been a sufficient period of time for him to recover.”

An old man stood nearby, cloaked in a rich green embroidered outfit. He had a sharp chin and slender eyes. In his hand he was holding a rather peculiar fan.

Although he came across as odd, he was Xi Rei’s highest and revered Master of medicine.

He had a natural disposition of an eccentric and borderline antisocial personality. This talented man only operated under the orders of the Imperial Family. Preferring to live like a hermit he was indeed a rare sight to be out in the open.

The toxin Feng Ming had been force fed was the brain child of this senile genius, who belted out a hearty laugh.

Shortly another man's voice entered the conversation.

-“The Prince has the Heavens luck shining upon him. Within such a devious grand plan you've manage to demonstrate your bravery and prowess, exterminating an enemy with evil intentions. Truly a trait you have inherited from the former King, your father.”

General Tong stood boldly as he gave endearing words of support to his Master. He rested his hands on his waist, one rested upon the hilt of his sword.

-“Exterminating an enemy with evil intentions?” Feng Ming repeated vacantly.

-“Indeed Your Highness, this is referring to the traitorous King sent from Fan Jia. Your Majesty brought a warranted end to An Xun by your blade. You were merciful to issue him a death that was quick and dignified”

-“An Xun is dead?”

Feng Ming's jaw gaped at the news and a soft cry escaped his lips. His strange reaction was quickly rectified when he was prompted by Rong Tian.

The older man had reached inside the bed covers, grabbed and tugged at Feng Ming's sleeve sending him a cue to play along.

Drawing his jaw shut, he swallowed.

After ingesting the foul poison, he had surmised that he had fallen into Rong Tian's trap. The doubts he had were washed away as soon as he had waken. He was kicking himself inside for making the wrong judgement.

Glad to have a conclusion to the doubts cast around Rong Tian, Feng Ming was now focused with the task at hand.

The situation he had been confronted by was perplexing and in all honesty Feng Ming couldn't even guess what had played out in the moments that followed his blackout.

He knew he had to proceed with caution, and silently waited for further instructions from Rong Wang.

Regardless whether he knew fact for fact, it was wiser to feign his knowledge. To get the ball rolling, he changed his expression, turning in a serious nod of agreement.

-“That's correct. Traitors that scheme against Xi Rei deserve a death sentence.”

Although he forced himself to sound assured Feng Ming couldn't help but think about his deceased uncle.

Now that An Xun is dead, what of the Queen's second spring?

Anyhow, it was that bastard who forced me to drink the poison... His death served him right.

He nodded again after coming to an internal agreement that the man's death could be justified.

-“Yes, his death was necessary.” He confirmed with an adamant tone.

The Prince made eye contact with the high ranking officials who had participated in the bedside vigil. It was clear that in each of their hearts the Crown Prince's old visage of a pathetic, irresponsible and useless coward had been permanently erased. Rather he was growing into a wise and resolute natural leader and on the thought of Xi Rei's promising future one couldn't help to feel a sense of content.

Feng Ming strained to shift himself so he could lean on Rong Tian for support. His face appeared hollowed out and he was in a terribly weak state that left him barely any energy to keep alert. Hence handling any government affairs was completely out of the question.

Chiu Lan hastily fetched a bowl of tepid herbal medicine* she had prepared for the Prince and brought the bowl to his lips.

General Chu had been present all this time and he raised his cupped hands in obeisance to Feng Ming.

His voice was deep when he said:

-“His Majesty facing such perils managed to eliminate An Xun and spared Xi Rei’s people from an upheaval. Indeed your choice to end his life was impetuous and brute and will be followed by enmity from those with different opinions in Court. However, on closer analysis it is evident that it was vital to save the people of Xi Rei and as an outcome you have won the faith of countless officials”

-“At present so long as we take care of the remaining spies An Xun had disseminated throughout Xi Rei, we will be able to overcome this hurdle. We have managed to capture almost half of the spies and these men have been tortured for confessions. Several have given statements on an impending attack against Xi Rei city. They have been left specific orders that under certain circumstances they must infiltrate and poison the wells to cause an internal strife and civil unrest. This is a matter of great importance. How shall we advance Your Highness? Rong Wang?”

Since the time Feng Ming had demonstrated his tactical talent, with his sermon on making foreign

alliances he had gain respect among the Generals at a rapid rate.

This was supported by fact these men who had once belittled him was now requesting Feng Ming to make a political decision for Xi Rei.

General Tong let out a chortle:

- “General Chu there’s no need to be worried over this matter. Rong Wang has already reassured us that the Prince had thoroughly planned his moves before taking An Xun’s life. May it be the spies that are to poison our water or an impending army from Fan Jia, we will be prepared to take them head on.”

He waved.

- “The Prince has recovered, nothing could hinder us now.”

The conversation was growing into a tangled mess inside Feng Ming’s brain and he could only assume that this was all Rong Tian’s doing and it was unclear on what responsibilities the devil had push upon him.

He turned his head, and sent the Regent King a death glare with all his might.

Rong Tian merely gave him a faint smile as a response, before softly saying:

- “You’ve just awaken so don’t strain yourself for now.”

Feng Ming’s lover then diverted his attention from him, raising his head to look at the occupants of the Prince’s chamber and ordered them in a firm manner.

-“The Prince has recovered his unconsciousness and everybody has placed in an exhausting effort in the past days. At this moment may you all be relieved of your duties. You may all take your leave for rest. General Tong, as for Fan Jia affairs you shall continue to be in charge. General Chu, the matters of chasing out the remaining spies rests on your shoulders you’ll need to be on guard to avoid any disasters arising.”

Rong Tian’s sharp eyes finally rested on the hermit man who sneezed when the man’s gaze fell on him. The Regent King’s lips turned into a slight smile.

-“Master Xia, the Prince’s body has not returned to complete health and I request that you are posted nearby in case there is any changes in his condition.”

All the subjects listened and dispatched themselves according to Rong Wang’s orders. Their minds were at ease with the Prince’s awakening so they happily left to do the Regent King’s bidding.

Poor Master Xia was about to fall over and snore on the spot, thanks to an infuriated Rong Tian who

caught and forced him to attend the Crowned Prince for the past seven days straight.

Although he was tired and could sleep like a log he was anxious so he bowed at the Regent King:

- “Rong Wang, humble Xia has a crop of herbal medicine that has never been tended by anyone else.”

-“Please permit Xia to have a look and I shall return immediately to the Prince’s quarters as you have ordered.”

Rong Tian understood that his man lived for his passion of medicine and the rare herbs he reared manually were his most treasured objects in the world.

He nodded:

- “Alright. Go quickly and return as quick and don’t delay the Prince’s next prescription of medicine.”

-“Humble Xia’s gratitude to Your Highness and the Regent King.” The old man quickly became invigorated and slipped out of sight with a big grin planted across his face.

A tranquil peace finally returned to the Prince’s chambers. Chiu Lan was clever and instinctively knew that Rong Tian wanted to be left alone with Feng Ming. She beckoned the other attendants in the room with her hands and without a sound the pack of servants retreated and closed the bedroom chamber doors behind them.

All that was left was Rong Tian and Feng Ming. Once the door clicked shut, Feng Ming felt the arms that held him tighten. He immediately looked back at the man. Rong Wang's eyes were red hot, his gaze pinning themselves upon his body. The famished look he was receiving was starting to burn into his flesh.

-“You...” Feng Ming muttered a little afraid.

Inside his heart he had so many questions that begged for answers but as soon as he started to speak again Rong Tian had already forced himself on the Prince.

His lover pressed his lips firmly over his and where their lips met the temperature was scalding.

The arm that had snaked around his small waist was going to snap him in two.

Alike if Rong Tian wanted to engulf the boy to make him part of his entity forever.

-“You little devil.”

Rong Tian kissed and nipped at Feng Ming's swelling lips as he vented his suppressed passion and the stress from the worry he had to live with for the past seven days.

- “Even daring to sleep for seven days.” He scolded.

- “You... You are the real devil here...”

In hindsight the mastermind behind all their troubles was Rong Tian and Feng Ming genuinely felt the rights to refute.

There was no need to ask, Feng Ming was sure Rong Tian had another plan up his sleeve which no less included him without any prior notice.

However, in his current circumstance he was not fit to be doing anything than have his lips kissed by a madman in a frenzy of lust.

How could he contest against this onslaught?

Chapter Twenty-two

It would be over Feng Ming's dead body before he would admit that it was Rong Tian's onslaught of kisses was the cause of his fainting. Conveniently, he blamed the Regent King's scheme and the dose of mysterious herbal medicine fed to him before he had properly recovered.

From the moment he woke up, he treated the Regent King with aversion. His eyes sharp as the tip of a blade as he bore holes into the man with his stare.

-“You still haven't explained everything to me!”
He claimed sourly, taking the position of the victim in this charade.

He displayed his annoyance, purposely distancing himself out of reach from Rong Tian on the bed pallet they shared.

Rong Wang stretched forth his long arm, and immediately drew him back into his hold. His breath gently tickled Feng Ming's ear:

- "Wasn't I explaining the situation to you yesterday?"

- "Yesterday?"

All Feng Ming could recall was their kissing session. Just the imagery made him feel humiliation. He gritted his teeth.

- "Alright, let me repeat it more slowly this time around." The Regent King offered.

Sensing Feng Ming's fumes growing, Rong Tian was smart to pacify him before he exploded. The Regent King quickly submitted himself and thoroughly retold the Crowned Prince from start to finish of the developments up to this point.

Rong Tian possessed eloquence. It was one of his strongest traits which gave him a tongue that was smoother than any silk. Naturally listening to him was enjoyable.

He explained to the disgruntled Prince that he had managed to be one step ahead of An Xun and before his uncle had entered the palace grounds he made haste to approach the Queen and fabricate an intricate plan. Importantly, was their move to lure An Xun into the "out of sight" corridor and eventually everything had

proceeded as planned. Rong Tian updated Feng Ming on the events after he had collapsed.

Feng Ming was baffled, listening intently to Rong Tian's thrilling words and he thought inwardly:

-“That's why we had to rush back to the Palace the other day. You left to organise so many things.”

When he heard that An Xun not only intended to force the Prince to drink the “poison”, his uncle wasn't leaving anything to chance. The older love-sick man wanted confirmation of death by defiling Feng Ming's body with a dagger to the heart.

-“Aiyah!”

Upon hearing how close he had been to a real death he shivered. Rong Tian looked at him on pitifully.

-“Don't worry, how could I permit him to hurt you? It is because of this turn in events that I was forced to make an early appearance. It is also the reason why An Xun's end came so violently. Alas, our plan fell through on the last hurdle.”

Feng Ming issued a cold snort:

-“Don't you pretend your innocence in this mess! Just because you've rushed to rescue me, the fact you've used me to your advantage is not erased. Hurry up and spit it out! Why didn't you include me in your scheme beforehand? You nearly had me scared to death!!”

-“By then, I had time constraints, An Xun had already entered the palace grounds. When could I’ve drawn you aside to explain everything? Moreover, An Xun is a cunning man. Under the heavens there is only one person that can lie to his face and succeed, and that is the Queen. If you had the truth in your possession, it would be inevitable that you’d give the game away.”

-“Humph! That’s nonsense!”

Feng Ming was dissatisfied with the idea that he wasn’t “competent” enough. Instead of drawing out his displeasure, he recalled the spies that An Xun had dispersed throughout Xi Rei thus changed the topic.

“Now that you’ve slayed An Xun, isn’t Xi Rei in a mess? Fan Jia’s Third Princess had just lost her husband so it is no doubt they will be seeking revenge. Along with the countless spies left in this country, it’s already a headache...”

Remembering the words of the general s that made an audience the day before, he quickly declared:

-“And I certainly don’t have any “grand scheme” that is meant to solve all our problems. I don’t know what kind of lies you’ve sprinkled onto General Tong! Saying that once I am rested that I with deal with matters appropriately? Don’t shift the responsibility onto me!”

Rong Wang silently gazed at Feng Ming’s tensed face. His lips turned slightly upwards before he softly whispered:

-“What are you afraid of? That I would bring you harm? I’ve got a great strategy under my sleeves, if you kiss me once, I might just tell you...”

His voice was like liquid silver, smooth, gorgeous and tempting. As he articulated every word slowly into the Prince’s ear, there was a certain charm about the way he was baiting the boy.

Feng Ming’s heart suddenly pounded against his chest to the pace of a herd of cattle being mustered. His face reddened, the heat burning his ears. He bowed his head and did not reconcile.

- “Tell me exactly why you deserved to be kissed? This is your Country, your throne, and your own stirring pot of trouble... Nnnhhhh... Nhhhhhhhhh...”

Halted midway in his speech, Rong Tian had covered the perfect red lips, mashing his own onto them and nipping at them until they were swollen. Their breath became more rapid and desperate in between the contact. The distinct scent of eaglewood incense filled the Prince’s quarters, smoky trials floated in the still air creating a hazy atmosphere.

Under the silk covers, Rong Tian had Feng Ming pinned. The Prince’s hands pushed above his head and kept firmly in place by one of Rong Wang’s hands. The man’s other hand went exploring over the curves of the boy’s body. The Regent King had rested himself between Feng Ming’s widespread legs.

Prolonging the torment, Rong Tian refused to touch Feng Ming's most delicate part directly. Instead he employed his own body to tease him by causing a stimulating friction with the gyration of his flesh against the boy's. His free hand moved south to caress the soft thighs that seemed to relax and melt against his touch.

Rong Tian's mouth was dosed in the taste of Feng Ming. With little effort, he had subdued any protest from the smaller boy who was moaning softly beneath him.

By now the Prince's body was a senseless mass that had given up the fight long ago, allowing himself to be raptured by this man.

The only part of Feng Ming's senses that had resisted the Regent King's power to be turned to mush, was his pair of large vivid black eyes which remained wide open glaring at the man. His expression held a hint of resistance which was buried under the overwhelming yearning they held for the face above.

Rong Tian's attacks strengthened. The energy they shared was reaching an indescribable plateau of ecstasy. Entering such a crucial moment Rong Wang was mindful to ensure Feng Ming was on the same level of pleasure.

His tongue, sought every inch of skin to seduce. Gradually, the feisty eyes let down their guard. The Regent King had him hooked and sunk. Feng Ming felt like he was being swallowed by quicksand.

As their love began to advance to the next stage, an invasive voice heralded an arrival from outside the Crowned Prince's room.

- "Your Majesty, the medicine is ready. Master Xia ordered it to be drunk whilst hot."

The soft voice belonged to Chiu Xing.

Feng Ming was startled and flustered. He frantically buckled under Rong Tian, attempting to throw him off with all his might. His jaw locked down as he turned his head. Unfortunately he had forgotten that Rong Wang's tongue had been excavating inside leading him to give the Regent King a nasty bite.

Rong Tian's face distorted from pleasure to pain. His eyebrows knitting into a frown and he shot a quick dissatisfied look at Feng Ming before relinquishing his hold over the boy.

Chiu Xing already opened the doors, entering whilst carefully holding a platter with a bowl of steaming black liquid in the middle. She made her way towards her master, her eyes glued on her cargo making sure she didn't spill any of the precious medicine.

- "This was just brewed. Your Majesty please drink it immediately."

She looked up and her eyes set upon an extremely flushed Feng Ming who was sharing his covers with

Rong Wang. This type of situation was a common sight in the ranks of nobles and relationships were respected.

Certainly, the Palace servants were well accustomed to male-male relationships given the history between the two men.

There was no reaction of surprise or shame from the Regent King who sat coolly resting himself on the back of the bed's headboard. Rong Tian outreached to bring Feng Ming into his arms so he could administer the Prince's medicine. However, Feng Ming was thick skinned and refused such treatment in front of his servant and struggled out of his hold, still beat red with embarrassment.

Chiu Xing kept a poker face, smiling and handed the bowl to the Regent King:

- "Your humble servant will now take leave. I shall not disturb Your Highnesses."

Without another peep, she slipped away making herself scarce.

As soon as Chiu Xing was out of sight, Feng Ming released a heavy sigh of relief. Rong Wang chuckled. Holding onto the bowl steadily with one hand, his other shot across the bed to retrieve his lover into his embrace. Once he had Feng Ming trapped, he coaxed the Crowned Prince into drinking the bitter fluid, mouthful by mouthful.

After Feng Ming downed the final gulp, he finally revealed his cards:

- “Given An Xun has been killed, we shall claim that he was murdered by an assassin when he arrived to visit his ill brother. The imperial guards were too late onto the scene, hence this disaster resulted. Conveniently, we will declare during this incident Xi Rei’s own King was murdered alongside. This being the case, the fact that we’ve lost the most important person in this country will mean that we are also the “victims” of this unsolicited attack. Giving substantial evidence that An Xun’s death is highly unlikely caused by Xi Rei. However, General Chu and several others are loyal to Xi Rei. In the case we will need their assistance in the future it is important to keep them as allies. We shall not conceal the truth from them. It is wiser to tell them that we were the ones that killed him.”

-“Who would be stupid enough to take our word for what happened? Especially if you are going to claim that I was the one who managed to take him down! Was this meant to be part of my awesome plan?” Asked Feng Ming still worried.

The Regent King looked at Feng Ming.

-“Oh, my little Prince!

He leant in to steal a kiss.

- “Haven’t I been weaving a good image for you? That His Royal Highness is brilliant, intelligent,

possesses god-like fighting skills, wise beyond his years and has great foresight for the Country's future? I've made sure you've left this mighty impression on the officials. This is the only way you can harness and gain the loyal support of your subjects. ”

Feng Ming gave him a snivel.

-“You still haven't given me your plan to resolve how we shall deal with Fan Jia's Royal family as well as those spies. It's obvious that they won't fall so easily for your reasoning of assassins! Also, why do I need you to build this great “image” for me in front of the Court? The one ascending the throne is the cunning Rong Tian and that's you!”

Feng Ming poked his finger at the Regent King's chest.

-“The one who has been eyeing the throne to Xi Rei has always been An Xun. His's wife is the Third Princess of Fan Jia. Although she is the daughter Fan Jia's King dotes on, it is possible that he shall not immediately declare war over the death of an in-law. We must make it a priority to appease the Third Princess and Fan Jia's King. Naturally, a little trouble along the way is unavoidable.”

-“Then...about the spies...”

“The spies in question...”

Rong Wang gave him a cryptic wink and he turned to the bedside then retrieved a scroll, unfurling it with a whisk of his hand.

-“This is the list of all the spies working for An Xun. A majority of them are present here within the city, so long as the Crowned Prince gives the command, they will all be arrested. Without a doubt, we will need to gather countless guards to watch over each well in the city. The water shall be tested by guards who would drink it every two hours, just for protection.”

The list presented before Feng Ming was painstakingly pieced together after An Xun’s death. Rong Tian invested many of his sleepless nights in a huge effort to gather intelligence. Hence, being able to present Feng Ming a completed list, he was very complacent of his handiwork.

Of course, Feng Ming was oblivious to the sweat and blood required to make the list as he lazily grabbed the flippant paper from the Regent King and had a look at it himself.

“If you knew there was a list earlier and you’ve indicated it would be a breeze to take care of the matters with Fan Jia, then why didn’t you just kill An Xun? Was there really a need for one scheme after another? Wouldn’t it been easier to take him out with one clean sweep? Especially, when you ended up dragging me into this and having me take in such a bad tasting poison!”

Feng Ming's complaints had Rong Wang on a boil. The Regent King stared in disbelief at the naïve boy who was ignorant of all his efforts.

All he wanted what to give the Prince a thorough punishment by ruthlessly kissing him until he passed out.

“Is it necessary to test the waters by drinking it? Can't we just use a few fishes to make sure the water is potable? As long as they are alive, they can be used as the judging meter. It's better than risking a human life.”

Rong Tian was suddenly surprised, taken back by such a simple suggestion which was a better solution. It was impossible to see by the naked eye whether water was poisoned and Feng Ming just proved his worth. The Regent King was delighted. He immediately tightened his arms around the Prince and planted a kiss on him, before laughing.

- “You are clever! The Crowned Prince is indeed a genius by coming up with such a wonderful technique. You are very smart indeed and it looks like you won't need my assistance to establish a great image for yourself to the rest of the people.”

Feng Ming was still confused:

- “Why should I build such image? You've still haven't told me!”

- “That's because we've already formally announced the death of Xi Rei's King. As well as

exposing An Xun tragic murder, there is no one that can oppose the Crowned Prince of his rightful place on the throne. At present the Prince shall represent Xi Rei's Kingdom."

-“Next March, you shall ascend the throne. So that means I can enjoy these months at leisure before the time has come...” Feng Ming smiled.

-“That’s not possible.” Rong Tian cut off bluntly.

-“Why?” Shot the Prince fully alert.

-“That’s because... In order to prevent any troops being deployed from Fan Jia to attack our borders, as well as to demonstrate our innocence on the part of An Xun’s death, Xi Rei has already issued an official statement to Fan Jia that stated, the Crowned Prince would personally visit Fan Jia and bring back the Third Princess and let the widow live out her natural life in our Country as compensation.”

“*You... WHAT!?*” Feng Ming screamed.

Chapter Twenty-three

One would think that Feng Ming's eyes could not stretch any wider and he almost jumped up from the sudden news.

-“Are you insane? Fan Jia hates Xi Rei to the bone and you've actually told them I was going in there so they can have me killed! Hey, let me make this clear to you: I do not want your stinky throne and nor will I occupy your position as the Prince. You can take everything back I don't want you to put me into a death-trap!” He shrieked cursing at Rong Tian.

Rong Wang's eyebrows creased before he replied:

-“You think I wish this upon you? Xi Rei has suffered through a severe drought this year. There is a food shortage and we've got troubles at hand with our own citizen. The bandits attacking our borders haven't helped the situation as we are nearly at war with the Country of Tong. If Fan Jia becomes our enemy, even Xi Rei's army would not be able to handle it at this rate. Fan

Jia's King has prepared his troops, several Generals are leading armies. Fortunately, they have not broken into our borders as yet. We are working on borrowed time. It appears the King of Fan Jia is hesitating to attack us, none the less his army is advancing slowly. We must utilize this opportunity to settle matters with Fan Jia. Xi Rei's Kingdom is not in a good position. The Imperial Court is in disarray, I cannot leave. I ask you only this once, for you to substitute for me as the Crowned Prince."

Rong Tian's voice had grown more serious and it was unfitting. Feng Ming shook his head.

Rong Tian turned to his old measures, in a threatening voice he warned:

- "If Xi Rei comes under fire, you as Xi Rei's Crowned Prince will certainly be killed."

- "It's better than obediently putting my head on the chopping board." Feng Ming muttered with his head down.

- "You clearly want me as the scapegoat..."

Seeing Feng Ming with such a terrible but rather comical aggrieve look, even the Regent King's anger washed away. Finding it funny, he caught him and brought the boy to his side.

In a gentler voice, he scolded him:

- “You don’t trust me? Of course I won’t be sending you into a pack of wolves. When you travel to Fan Jia I have a fool proof plan to have you return to Xi Rei safely in one piece.”

-“How? An Xun’s dead, unless you can miraculously make another one...”

-“Silly, An Xun is dead. Not everyone in Fan Jia will hate you. In fact you’ve done several people a good service. Fan Jia’s King does not have any sons as heirs, only three daughters. You’ve rid the family of one person to which they may have to fight the throne with. Thus, at least the Third Princess’s two sisters would love you for your deed. They will be the first to run, thank and protect you.” He finished with a note of sarcasm.

Again, with fighting and competing for the Throne! On an interesting note, Feng Ming was surprised that even in this ancient time, a Queen as the monarch of the country was not prohibited. That was really interesting idea.

Then Feng Ming was taken by that thought and quickly voiced his concerns;

-“Since there are only three Princesses leading to the Throne, they each have the right to inherit the throne. Why would the Third Princess be willing to come to Xi Rei?”

-“You can’t come to a conclusion on this part.” The Regent King grinned, he place Feng Ming on his lap,

keeping his arms wrapped possessively around his slender waist before explaining to him:

- “The Third Princess’s husband is now deceased. She had no children thus she has no chance in getting the throne. If she stays in Fan Jia, she would be a sitting target for anyone that wants to ensure her chance remains at zero. If she was smart, she will return to Xi Rei with you.”

- “But, An Xun...” Feng Ming started.

- “Don’t be afraid. I will let you meet a person.”

Rong Tian interrupted him and he called out into the air, beckoning someone to come:

“Rong Hu, come in.”

The grand doors of the bedchambers softly creaked open and a person entered soundlessly then knelt at their feet.

- “As you’ve wished Master.”

The voice was young. The invited guest was a man that was possibly in his late teens. Feng Ming studied the stranger curiously.

Rong Wang nodded and ordered:

- “Rong Hu, lift up your face.”

- “Eh!” Feng Ming responded, when the face came into view. Rong Hu had fair skin, large eyes that were set in an extremely handsome face. From what Feng Ming

gathered by sight alone, he estimated the man to be around seventeen. The expression the boy carried was very calm and mature.

Sharing the same surname as Rong Tian, Feng Ming couldn't dismiss whether they were actual brothers as Rong Tian also had the same air or maturity around him.

Correcting his suspicions, Feng Ming reminded himself that it was impossible for Rong Tian to be an actual "Rong". He was the Xi Rei's King's only child that was fostered.

As Feng Ming's imagination ran wild, Rong Wang finally gave the answer away:

- "Feng Ming, Rong Hu grew up together with me, however, he has always concealed himself and acts as my shadowing bodyguard. Rong Hu, this is your new owner. Xi Rei's Prince, An He. His real name is Feng Ming. Let me make this clear to you. His real name must remain a secret that only you and I will know. It must not be leaked to any outsiders."

Feng Ming thought inwardly:

"That's not right, I know that fact too!"

- "Greetings Your Royal Highness." Rong Hu promptly said whilst giving Feng Ming an unwavering deep look with his sharp eyes. The intensity of his gaze somewhat startled Feng Ming, it was as if Rong Hu was engraining every feature of Feng Ming into his own mind.

The boy then bowed his head:

-“Rong Hu will ensure his Royal Highness is unscathed.”

Rong Tian nodded his head:

-“Very well. you may go.”

Rong Hu stepped back, giving the pair a salute and quietly retreated.

-“From now on, he will protect you from the shadows.”

Feng Ming gave the Regent King a strange look:

-“You honestly don’t think I’d believe that two stupid princesses from Fan Jia and one good guard would ensure my safety, right?”

Rong Tian chuckled, nodding.

-“I’m not going.” The Prince objected.

-“You have to go.”

-“Nope, I’m not going!”

Rong Wang closed his eyes and thought for a moment before asking:

- “What would it take for you to agree to go?”

Without reservation, Feng Ming ordered:

- “You come along with me!”

-“If I was in a position to leave Xi Rei unattended, why would have been the need to send you off in the first instance?” Rong Wang smiled.

Feng Ming was distressed he was backing into a dead end.

Rong Wang silently watched his lover for a while, and then let out a loud sigh. He moved Feng Ming from his lap, stood up and stroll to the window and remained there gazing out into the distance. Not sure what to make of Rong Tian’s strange behaviour, Feng Ming could only think of what Rong Tian would do to force him to submit.

To his surprise, Rong Tian lifted his silence:

-“Well, if it’s going to be like this. You don’t need to go.”

-“Really?” Feng Ming looked wide eyed happy, his mood lifting up immediately with those words while Rong Wang didn’t say a word.

Conversely, since the day Feng Ming managed to weasel out of leaving Xi Rei, the Regent King did not make an appearance in the Prince's Halls.

It was now already the third day in a row. Not being able to see Rong Tian for three days was starting to take its toll on Feng Ming who was finding the cold treatment very tough to combat.

The Crowned Prince's hall had a spell placed upon it. Feng Ming's days were spent in an awful silence. The blankets he slept in were excruciatingly cold and everywhere he looked none of the servant girls were his normal familiars.

Feng Ming's eyes monitored the main entrance like a hawk, his ears at attention, listening out for the sound of familiar footsteps.

Unconsciously, by not being able to come into contact with Rong Tian it had ultimately brought him to the stage where he was starting to be sleepless during the long nights.

The countless flow of servants and messengers he had sent to find the Regent King was fruitless. All returned, reporting that Rong Wang was busy and could not sacrifice any time to see him. When Feng Ming tried to take matters into his hands to search for the man, he would be blocked off by guards.

He had never expected Rong Wang to be so heartless and that he meant it when he didn't want to see Feng Ming.

Poor Feng Ming could only be left with his thoughts.

Although I am afraid of death, if you beg me a little wouldn't I easily give into you?

Even though you agreed to let me stay, you are embittered by my choice. Why must you hide it?

All the Prince could do was resign to his chambers for the past three days, being bored to death in the Imperial Palace was just as bad as senselessly running to Fan Jia.

I've already died once. . . , I guess it shouldn't be scary the second time around?

On the end of the third day he held vigil for Rong Tian, Feng Ming couldn't stand it any longer and called out Rong Hu from the shadows.

Rong Hu appeared as requested:

-“What are my Master's orders?”

-“You go and tell that bastard Rong Tian, that I will go!”

Feng Ming bit his lip:

- “I’ll go! Tell him he has to come and see me!”

Instead of taking the order, Rong Hu showed indifference before replying:

- “The Regent King has ordered Rong Hu to be your personal body guard. Under no circumstances shall I leave your side.”

Feng Ming let out an enraged scream of frustration, crying out to call for another guard.

Rong Hu disappeared out of sight.

When several guards entered the Prince’s chamber Feng Ming belted out his commands:

- “Go and tell Rong Wang, that I agree and promise that I will happily march into Fan Jia to accept my death!”

The guards made haste and galloped away.

After two hours, they returned to report to the Crowned Prince:

- “Rong Wang has replied that all the provisions and required equipment for the Prince’s journey is prepared. Your Highness shall set out on your journey tomorrow. The Regent King is busy so he will be unable to personally see you off.”

The Prince was steaming with rage, his heart was on the verge of jumping out and he felt light headed. All emotions of sorrow and grief from the rejection and desertion he was given by Rong Tian now churned chaotically inside.

He was at a lost, he arrived alone into this ancient world and the only support he thought he had was nothing but a heartless unreliable bastard.

Suddenly, he pulled his heart out from despair.

He turned and nodded at the guards, bitterly telling them to pass the word:

- “Well, you go and tell him, I don’t need him to see me off. Once I get to Fan Jia I don’t plan on coming back to Xi Rei’s Kingdom!”

To be continued.

Kingdom of Tong: Blue

Kingdom of Fan Jia: Green



鳳弄『鳳于九天』

Terms and Information

Reincarnation:

In Chinese belief, once a “normal” person passes away their soul goes towards the Heavens and waits in line to have its memory erased. Some will be destined for reincarnation, but some, accordingly to their sins during their lifetime will be sent to hell for punishment.

It is believed, that the most purist beings such as priests and heroes would be offered a place in the Heavens. Chinese emperors are believed to be godly beings which will rise to the sky upon death and reclaim their place in the Heavens.

Tai Yi:

Is a medicinal healer that only served Royalty.

Sacrificial Death Burials:

In China it was customary to bury servants, concubines and empress when an emperor or King becomes deceased. In belief, that they shall serve him when his highness reaches the “Place of Heavenly” beings.

Usually, they were hung and buried, or even buried alive. However, this tradition dissolved around the third century B.C.

Regent or Regent King:

A person who is appointed to act as a head of state (ruling or not) because the rightful ruler is a minor, not present or debilitated.

The Regent exists in this story because the current Crowned Prince is not of age.

Tang Dynasty - 618-907 A.D.:

The Tang Dynasty was the most prosperous era for the Ancient Chinese Empire, flourishing culture in the form of Arts. It was a period of progress and stability.

Ming Dynasty - 1368-1644 A.D.:

The Ming Dynasty was a great productive era. China was in a very stable economy. Armies and navies were well established, allowing China to venture out into the world to explore and liaison trade with the Europeans.

Time (measurements):

In Ancient China, time was told by “Xiu Chen”. This was basically the equivalent of two hours in our modern world.

Special lesson - Honorary name, suffixes honorific, and Chinese names -

Emperor (Huang di): The title given to the King of Kings.

King (Wang): A head of state or someone of high nobility and status, title can also be given by the Emperor.

Prince (Wang zi)

Master: Someone of nobility or an individual highly respected for their wisdom or expertise in a skill.

I haven't found a better alternative for the high Court Noble in the second chapter, as the Chinese character that follows his name means "Old man" but he isn't one, he's actually around 18-19 years old! It's one of those things that often get lost in translation. So instead, I've called him Master.

Chinese names: In Chinese names, the surname comes first followed by the given name. In formalities one would address another by their surname followed by their ranking/position/occupation. The given names are only used by people close to you.

So it's why the Regent King Rong Tian is also calling Rong Wang or Rong Tian by the others people.

Gates of Hell:

In Buddhist beliefs in Ancient China, those who die would arrive at the Gates of Hell and would be sentenced accordingly to an underground punishment level-chamber where their souls will atone for their earthly sins. This is an intermediate stage before reincarnation.

Social rankings:

Traditional China had very distinct class systems, much based on your blood lineage, such as royalty, nobility, government officials, military, mercenaries and the very poor peasant class.

It was expected that one should respect those who are above them as it reflects their honour and dignity as a citizen of the kingdoms.

Regardless of class they were expected to “know their place” in society and to give the family name a good reputation. Often, the poor would sell their children to the rich as “servants”.

Mannerism:

When speaking to Royalty, servants always refer to themselves as “lowly”, and they always offer well wishes upon seeing the important person. i.e. “I wish you a hundred years of life” or “I wish you good health”.

When talking to royalty or someone of high ranking, the lesser usually addresses oneself with a third person voice.

In the same manner, be aware that nobles and royalty tend to refer to themselves as a third person.

Bamboo Shoots (edible):

Bamboo budding from the earth is harvest as food in numerous Asian cuisines. It has been part of the Chinese diet since the ancient periods.

The shoots themselves require several rounds of boiling, and is mostly enjoyed for its acrid taste and crunchy texture. It is often found in stir-fry dishes and dumpling dishes.

The (Seven) Warring States Period- 475 - 221 B.C.:

Ancient China was separated into seven major states, which were continuously at war with each other. During this period, Agriculture, industry, economy, weapons and technology flourished. So did the legacy of war tactics written by tacticians of that time from that era which are still respected and studied in this age.

This was a complete mess for the country itself, there was no time to develop the societies and culture until the next period of Ancient China were unification was beginning.

Cao Cao - 曹操 – 155-220 A.D.:

He was a military strategist, politician and poet whose adventures have been much popularised in a series of novels “Romance of Three Kingdoms”.

He was marvelled for being a Master of both literature and the sword. Records of him detailed a crafty war tactician who also excelled in the arts. He was known to treat good his allies as family and was merciless with his enemies.

Interestingly Cao Cao is often depicted as a brutal tyrant. However, he was praised for his brilliance as a ruler. Due to such unscrupulous depictions Cao Cao in modern times, can be used as the Chinese equivalent of the English saying “Speak of the Devil”... (And he arrives).

Feng Ming addresses Rong Tian as “Cao Cao”, which confuses the man as it sounded like Feng Ming was calling him grass twice. (草 Cao)

Three measurements:

In a few Asian countries, the three measurements which are the chest waist and hips are highly prized.

As it is very personal information. And men just love the numbers.

Feng Ming's name:

Feng Ming means the cry of phoenixes, as these birds are seen as good omens and joy.



Congee:

It's a Rice gruel or Rice porridge, usually serve to ill people.



Chinese calligraphy/Brush writing:

Chinese brush writing was one of the earliest developments by the Chinese. They also invented paper! Commonly, the brush tip was derived from feathers or animal hair.

In ancient China one's writing was often also considered an art form. How well you wrote reflected your teachings as well as your artistry.

Sun Wu or Sun Zi:

Was a high ranking military General and strategist in the 6th century B.C. He wrote the military book: "Art of War"

Sun Zi's "Art of War":

It's the oldest military treatise book it consists of thirteen chapters which thoroughly explains tactics and theories in war. Each chapter is devoted to one aspect of warfare, it is said to be the definitive work on military strategies and tactics of its time, and is still read for its military insights.

Interestingly, a lot of its theories are still applied in modern day warfare and even businesses seek guidance in its wisdom. I know that during the Vietnam War, the generals of the Vietnam side were avidly employing tactics that they read from the Art of War to hold out their defence against the Americans.

Subjective motivation - 主观能动性:

To strive for victory by taking initiative in your own hands.

Death by a Thousand Cuts:

It was a capital punishment carried out from the Ming Dynasty up till the early 20th century. The criminal was bound to a pole and literally parts of an individual were cut off until they ultimately died from blood loss.

Bu Neng Shi Yan - 不能食言 - Proverb:

You can't eat one's word - To go back on one's word.

Three Months of Spring – 三月春 (San Yue Chun):

It's the name given the unique flowers found within Xi Rei in this story. The literal translation can be interpreted as "Three months of Spring".

Spring (春) the character can also be used in the context of youth, love and lust. Therefore the name can be understood as "Three Months of lust" implying lovers would have fun in bed for three long and cold months with this flower that would magically invigorate. (Ancient Viagra?).

Rong Wang (Senior):

In Royal Court, it is common to inherit a name and a position from your deceased Father.

Raccoon - 狸猫 (Li Mao):

The common raccoon are also popularly known as “Tanuki” from Japanese. In Chinese myths, raccoons are believed to be spiritual animals that possess the power to transform and are a master of disguising as objects, people etc. They are known to be mischievous.

Terrace:

Terraces are useful for agriculture. Using slops by carving tiered platforms to cultivate crops.

The design allows maximum usage of sunlight, decrease soil erosion and harnessing natural water run-off. They look amazing from a plane too!



Clarification of An Xun's status:

Please note that An Xun is married to the Third Princess of Fan Jia, although he is entitled "King of Fan Jia", it's just a name given to him as he is Royalty and is in the running for the throne.

So this means that he is currently not the King of Fan Jia and he is only the third in line for accession. The Chinese word for King (Wang) is also the same word for Imperial and Royal.

Second Spring:

In Chinese, the youth and love are considered one's Spring-time. Hence, having a second Spring means to enjoy a second round of love.

Fruits and seedlings:

In ancient Chinese culture, people tend to talk about babies and children in context of seedlings and fruit. So the Prince is frequently called a fruit in the nineteen chapter.

Checking pulse:

Traditional Chinese medicine doctors routinely check a person's pulse as a judgement for their state of health.

Diagnosis of many diseases often depended on the patterns and irregularities to one's pulse as well as swelling of "chakra" points and condition of skin colour etc.

Medicine:

Remedies revolved around boiling herbs, roots and parts of animals.

The taste leaves much for improvement. Usually the concoctions are bitter and the smell so pungent it makes you cringes.

Characters' Gallery

Feng Ming

鳳鳴



Chiu Lan



Chiu Xing



Chiu Yue



Tong Yi

容瞳



Rong Tian

容恬



安巡



An Xun

Rong Hu

